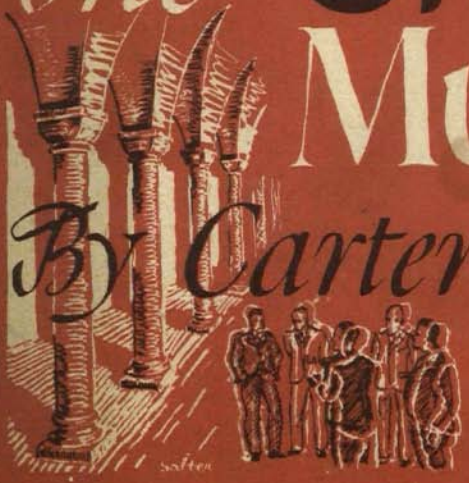
A Mercury Mystery

The Unicorn Murders

By Carter Dickson



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BY

CARTER DICKSON

A MERCURY MYSTERY

THE AMERICAN MERCURY • NEW YORK

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher*

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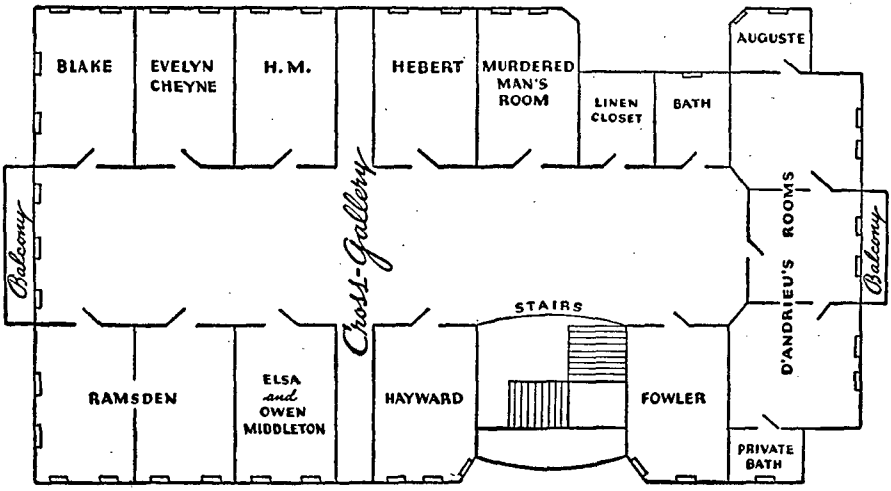

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A MERCURY BOOK, NO. 52

Published by THE AMERICAN MERCURY, Inc., 570 Lexington Avenue, N. Y.

Single copy 25¢. Twelve books $3.00

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CHAPTER ONE

LET ME STATE a case to you, and ask you what you would do under the circumstances.

You are on a holiday in Paris, in the green month when spring has almost become summer. One evening towards twilight you are sitting on the terrace at Lemoine's in the rue Royale, having an *apéritif*. Then you see walking towards you a girl you have previously known in England. This girl walks straight up to your table and very gravely begins to repeat a nursery-rhyme. She then sits down at the table, and proceeds to tell you what sounds like the most bewildering gibberish you have ever heard in your life. Well?

Yes, that is precisely what I did. I humored her. I was a fool — but then I was interested in Evelyn Cheyne.

When, a year or so ago, I was prevailed on by H.M. to write the story of the Plague Court Murders, I never thought I should have to take it up again. But in a sense I am compelled to write this record, as you will understand if you care to follow it. Biographical details are hard going; unfortunately, a few are necessary here. The passport says: name, Kenwood Blake. Age, thirty-eight. Address, Edwardian House, Bury Street, St. James's. Occupation, none to speak of. I was intended for Diplomacy, and stuffed full of languages. In 1914 I went across as an attaché of the British Embassy in Washington; and a year later, when I had got over the age limit, I contrived to wrangle a commission in the Seagrave Highlanders. Nobody found out my incompetence, and I didn't do so badly for two years. I was hoping to get a battalion just before I walked into a four-point-two at Arras; and, when I was convalescent again, they shot me out as unfit for active service.

Then, one raw disconsolate day in London when I was feeling pretty low, I ran into H.M. lumbering along with his head down, shaking his fist and cursing certain government officials. I think he saw how things stood with me, although you would not have guessed it from his greeting. He dragged me up into his lair overlooking the Embankment — and thus I went into the Service: having no particular aptitude for it, H.M. said, except a lack of guile.

I went from Counter-Espionage to Intelligence, which meant foreign work, and it lasted until the end of the war. This is not the place to tell about those

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adventures, or the good fellows who shared them. But I was thinking back to them when I sat on the terrace at Lemoine's in the rue Royale, sipping a Dubonnet.

It was towards eight o'clock in the evening, just time to be thinking comfortably about dinner, and blowing up with what looked like an ordinary summer rain-squall. The awning thrummed over my head; whirls of dust blew newspapers like the white aprons of waiters. Bear in mind that for two weeks I had not looked at a newspaper, except to glance at the headlines. A newspaper scuttled past me in the gust, and I set my foot on it. Preparations for the King of England's Jubilee, said one headline; trouble in India, said another; but the biggest splash was something about two people who seemed to be named Flamande and Gasquet.

Now, this mildly irritated me in the way that a meaningless popular tag does before you have any idea of what it is about. I was now curious to know who or what were Flamande and Gasquet. Everybody seemed to be talking about them. Even at that moment the sparsely filled terrace was a babble of talk punctuated by these names. I had got the idea, somehow, that they were rival boxers; or possibly even rival cabinet-ministers. Anyway, the headline of the story I was too lazy to read announced that one had sent a sinister challenge to the other; and added a lot of superlatives.

A waiter came hurrying over after the lost paper. Some spur urged me to ask a question at random as I handed the paper back.

"Are you," I said, "a friend of Flamande or of Gasquet?"

The result was rather startling. A passing *agent de police* stopped suddenly, hunched his shoulders as though he had been shot in the back, and slowly craned round his neck to look at me with one of the most sinister expressions of suspicion that ever knocked a man off-balance. Then he walked straight through the entrance to the hedge.

"Your passport, monsieur," he said curtly

The waiter made vast, rumbling noises of deprecation.

"But he meant no harm, this gentleman! It was only the way ——"

"English," said the policeman, examining my passport. He made a noncommittal noise. "You have used, monsieur, words which might or might not be intended as a signal. I do not wish to interfere with a harmless traveler, you understand. But ——!"

"It is probably my ignorance of your language, monsieur," I said, and

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bowed in that way which always makes you feel like a damned fool. "To tell you the truth, I spoke without thinking. I have no wish to disparage your boxers or your cabinet-ministers——"

"Our *what?*" demanded the policeman.

"Your boxers," I said, letting go a left at the air, by way of illustration, "or your cabinet-ministers. I have been given to understand that these gentlemen were either one or the other. . . ."

I could see that the trouble was over, although we were attracting some unpleasant attention from others. The law suddenly guffawed behind closed teeth and kicked at the pavement.

"Now, that," he said, beaming, "that is good, eh? They make fun of you, our Parisians. They have bad manners, monsieur, for which I apologize. Excuse me for troubling you. *A'voir*, monsieur."

"But look here," I said, "exactly who is this Flamande?"

"He is a murderer, monsieur," said the policeman. Then, hitching his shoulders, he saluted and swung away through the hedge as though he had delivered a curtain-line. It was several seconds later that I suddenly realized that the policeman had walked away with my passport.

Then things began happening swiftly. I was not going to cut up a row, because I had already attracted too much attention. After the triumph of his dramatic exit had passed, the policeman would discover my passport in his hand and return it; in any event, the waiter would know his number and I could easily get it back. So I was just sitting down to recover a ruffled temper when I saw Evelyn Cheyne.

She was not an old friend; I had met her just four times before. Now, Evelyn has dark hair and hazel eyes, and I do not wish to be accused of unchivalrous speech when I say that in appearance she is the sort of thing the battalion thinks about when it is coming back from the line after three weeks under fire. But (previous to the time I write of) she would never admit her true *métier*. She said she wished to be valued for her Brain — and, like a fool, I believed it. She had such a confoundedly cool, casual way of talking about Progress and Service and the Future of the Race and similar ideals which seem to me pure hogwash. Evelyn blasphemed nature by wearing tailored suits and a little pince-nez with a chain going back to the ear.

This, as I say, is what I thought — until that evening at Lemoine's. I saw Evelyn as she always ought to have been. The girl across the terrace wore

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white, with some sort of white sports-coat, and one of those tilted white hats. Evelyn's skin glows with that brownish-gold flesh tint which is so seldom seen in real flesh. Her hazel eyes were fixed on me; they looked impassive, but she was rather nervously opening and shutting the catch of her handbag. Then she came across to my table, and I jumped up.

"Hullo, Ken," she said, as coolly as of old.

"Hullo, Evelyn."

Then, just as gravely, she spoke.

"*The lion and the unicorn*," said Evelyn, "*were fighting for the crown:*
The lion beat the unicorn all around the town . . ."

Now, if this sort of thing had been sprung on me some minutes before, I should have either laughed or asked what she was talking about. But it came too soon after the inexplicable business with that policeman. I was beginning to feel that my quiet holiday had taken an abrupt, weird turn towards mad events; that the compass needle had switched and I must accept its direction.

"Let's see," I considered. "How does the rest of it go?

"*Some gave them white bread, some gave them brown;*
Some gave them plum-cake and drummed them out of town."

She drew a breath of relief and sat down with her eyes still fixed on me.

"Order me a drink, will you, Ken?" she said. "You know, I'm terribly glad it turned out to be you. Perhaps we can get a number of things straightened out now. That last meeting — well, it all seemed to go wrong, didn't it?"

"It did," I admitted. "And the whole mess was my fault. If I hadn't made those remarks about your æsthetic friends . . ."

"I could have told you what I thought of my æsthetic friends," she grinned, "if only you had given me some *hint*, Ken! If only you had told me you were still in the Service. You turned a blank face every time I tried to bring up the subject . . . You see, I had to know. I even went to the point of asking H.M. whether you were. But all he would do was make lewd remarks about me, and how I ought to be married or something. But just now I've got to get back to business, and tell you . . ."

Her face grew grave again. She looked round quickly, and then made the following rather bewildering statements:

"Sir George Ramsden is bringing the unicorn to London. We are to go to

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the blind man tonight, but I don't know why, because Sir George will come to Paris."

She delved in her handbag. "Sir George got to Marseilles yesterday. He will travel by the regular airlines, because he doesn't trust private planes. There are two French Air-Union planes from Marseilles to Paris today; he will travel by the second, which reaches Le Bourget at 9:15 tonight. . . . The last instructions I had were that you and I should drive to 'The Blind Man' — it's an inn a couple of miles on the other side of Orléans — and be there by eleven o'clock. I gather that for some reason Sir George, as soon as he gets to Paris, is going to turn round and go straight to that inn. The signal to make yourself known, of course, is reciting the lion-and-unicorn verse and having it completed. But that's all I know about the whole thing. It's sealed orders all along. What were you told?"

To gain time I ordered two more Dubonnets and some cigarettes for Evelyn; and then I was very deliberate about lighting my pipe. It's easy enough to say afterwards that I should have told Evelyn straight out I wasn't the man she had apparently been scheduled to meet at Lemoine's. But the cussedness of the human soul does not run in sane grooves. I didn't mean to let Evelyn get away from me; and, besides, I thought I could put up as good a show in the Service as the probably unsalted agent they had really sent out. Hence I was going to be that agent.

"And you don't know," I suggested, "what the unicorn *is*?"

"No! That's what I want you to tell me."

"Well . . . the fact is, Evelyn, I don't know myself."

She stared at me. "But surely — where do you get your instructions?"

"From H.M. himself. And you know him. Still, we've got to compare notes. Is there anything else you know, anything at all?"

"Nothing except what you've seen in the papers — that Flamande says he is going to be aboard that plane. I'll bet you that's what has worried our people even before they knew he would threaten it. That's what makes it so horribly dangerous. I'll jolly well admit *I'm* frightened though they say Gasquet will nab him this time. Well, I doubt it."

"Look here," I said, and dropped my defenses momentarily, "who are Flamande and Gasquet? Word of honor, they weren't mentioned in any instructions I ever got."

She made a wry face.

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"You ought at least to read the papers. Flamande, Ken, is the most picturesque criminal France has sported for years. This duel is being discussed like a football match in England ——"

"Duel?"

"Between Flamande, the super-knave, and Gasquet, the Chief Inspector of the Sûreté. Oh, don't be so stolid, Ken! — and don't laugh either. It mightn't happen in England, but it can happen here. Nobody knows what Flamande looks like. But then, with the exception of a few intimates, nobody knows what Gasquet looks like either: that's his chief trump. Neither of them is what you'd call a universal linguist, but the snag is this. Each of them speaks three languages perfectly, French, English, and German. Either one, for instance, might pose as an Englishman or an American and deceive you or me. Finally, they're both chameleons who can play any part they like. I don't mean with false whiskers or wigs or anything silly like that. But, since nobody has ever seen Flamande to remember his face, what's to prevent him from being a doctor or a lawyer ——"

"Or an archbishop or a ballet girl ——"

She looked at me steadily. "Don't talk like that, Ken, until you've read his record. I think you won't joke when you've read that. And I'll take what you've said quite seriously. Yes, he might be an archbishop. I doubt if he could manage the ballet girl. You see, although nobody has seen him long enough to remember exactly what he looks like, they know that he's fairly tall and has rather a heavy voice —" She opened her handbag and took out a notebook. "Just glance over this, will you? No, I don't think you'll joke then."

"Listen, Evelyn. These artists at disguise can never fool anybody who's had any experience with it. But you say the man's a murderer . . ."

She swung round. "I didn't say that, Ken. But you believe so, too? Then you did see that piece in the paper this morning, about the murder at Marseilles? Flamande did that, and he'll write to claim the credit presently. I *know* Flamande did that killing, although there's nothing to connect him with it. And it's the first time he's been forced to kill. He —" Her excitement dwindled as she stared at me. "I say, Ken, what's this? Why did you say 'murderer'? Flamande hadn't killed anybody until yesterday. And nobody connects that business with him yet. Who told you he was a murderer?"

"A policeman," I said and stopped.

Where was that policeman with my passport?

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CHAPTER TWO

IT WAS PROBABLY a coincidence, it was unquestionably a coincidence, but it made me swear. But I was not going to tell Evelyn until I had made sure. So I said:

"A bit of gossip, that's all. I suppose they're willing to credit him with anything, including murder. . . . But what's this about a killing in Marseilles?"

She pointed to the notebook, where a newspaper cutting was stuck between the leaves.

"I cut it out of *Paris-Midi* today. There's not much, at its face value, to connect it with Flamande, but there's something to connect it with our job. It's — well, it looks unholy, Ken. I don't want to believe we've got into a world of horrors and fabulous animals. That happened last night. Read it."

There were adjectives in the headline, and the story continued in the same vein.

> "A terrible and mysterious tragedy is reported to have been discovered last night in the park off the Promenade du Prado, at Marseilles. An agent of police, patrolling the paths just after dark, saw a man propped up at the foot of a lamppost near the Hoche fountain. The agent approached, thinking the man was drunk, and found that he was near death from a terrible wound between the eyes.
>
> "The victim's clothing was much torn, his body bruised, and his right arm broken. The principal wound between the eyes was at first thought to have been caused by a bullet, since the skull had been pierced in a wound the exact shape and size inflicted by a shot from a revolver of higher caliber.
>
> "The victim was taken to the Hospital of Our Lady, and died in the ambulance. He spoke once or twice, but repeated only one word in English. Dr. C. S. Melisse, who has an extraordinary command of that language, informs us that this word was '*unicorn.*'
>
> "This was followed by the surprising discovery that the hole in the head of the unfortunate victim had not been made by a bullet. No bullet or missile of any character was in the wound. It was a clean puncture, penetrating into the brain to a depth of four inches.
>
> "No weapon of any sort has been found. Indeed, Dr. Melisse informs us that no human strength would be sufficient to drive any

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variety of spike at such a depth into the head, and pull it out again. He states also that he knows of no firearm which could make a wound of that sort.

"In fact, Dr. Melisse facetiously remarks that the only thing which could have caused that frightful wound would be the long, sharp horn of an animal.

"We understand that these statements have been confirmed, though more guardedly, by Dr. Edouard Hébert, the police surgeon for the Department of Bouche du Rhône. We are also told that the findings of Dr. Hébert are so remarkable that he may go to Paris for consultation with the medical branch of the Sûreté.

"The dead man has been ascertained to be M. Gilbert Drummond, a solicitor, of London. In accordance with the directions in his passport, M. Drummond's brother in London has been notified of the sad affair. M. Drummond had been staying for three days at the Grand Hotel, having come to Marseilles from Paris.

"We are informed that the police are in possession of a valuable clew."

"Look here, Evelyn, the unicorn is a fabulous animal, but it's not quite so fabulous as this. Had this poor devil Drummond any connection with our job?"

"No. Not so far as I know."

"And Flamande?"

"Flamande dropped his familiar note to *Le Journal* last night, and it appeared this morning. All the papers have copied it, and the evening ones have a note from Gasquet. Mark this! Flamande's note was postmarked Marseilles, and went out at five o'clock yesterday afternoon. It said: '*I am interested in strange animals. To-morrow, good friends, I shall be among the passengers of the Marseilles-Paris air-liner before it reaches its destination. — Flamande.*' "

"What about the detective?"

She smiled. "He has his own sense of the dramatic-too. His own was just a scrawled line. '*So, good friends, shall I. — Gasquet.*' "

"Sent from Marseilles, too?"

"I don't know. That wasn't divulged."

"Let's be sensible. You don't seriously think, do you, that Sir George Ramsden is running about with some kind of animal which got loose and gored the fellow in that park?"

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"No, but — I tell you Flamande is behind that murder! Oh, don't ask me why I think so, or what evidence I have! I tell you I *know* he did!" She clenched her hands. "After all, give me some credit! Nobody else spotted that little item in *Paris-Midi*, or connected it with Flamande."

"Maybe for the best of reasons. You say he has never been known as a killer."

She lifted one eyebrow. "You have all the logic on your side. I only tell you I know. I get these hunches, or I shouldn't be in the jolly old service at all. And, why should Flamande want the 'unicorn,' anyway?"

I pointed out that Flamande hadn't said he did; he had only said he would be on that plane. However, it was some consolation to know my adventure with the policeman, and the lost passport, had been only a coincidence. If Flamande meant to travel with Sir George Ramsden, he wasn't sauntering about Paris in an *agent's* uniform: which was nonsense anyhow. Evelyn brought me back to the present.

"It's eight-thirty, and we're due at that inn at eleven. It's a seventy-five-mile drive, you know: near Orléans. We'd better be starting. My car's outside; plenty of petrol, and a map. Have you got a bag packed? We may be back tonight, or we may not."

I gave some hurried explanation of why I had no bag packed; I was stopping at the Crillon just round the corner, and that could be arranged in a moment. But it put the lid on any chase for that damned passport tonight.

I glanced through Flamande's dossier while I was packing my bag at the hotel. Evelyn had it all listed and cross-indexed, and it roused my unwilling admiration. Although no murder had hitherto been put down against Flamande, twice he had nearly beaten a victim to death. That man had the nerve of hell, a satiric sense of humor, and a brain whose brilliance lay in the unexpected simplicity of its strokes. No safe could keep him out, yet a child could have operated his cracksman's method — if any child had thought of it. He would pay two visits to the safe he meant to rob. On the first night he would merely remove the front of the dial on the combination-lock; behind this he would place a circle of thin white paper smaller than the dial; then he would replace the dial and go away. The safe would be opened at least once or twice next day. That night he would visit it again, remove the paper, and study the ridges and indentations made in it by the action of the mechanism on the opening of the safe. This would give him the combination, and he could open

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the safe without the least fuss or trace afterwards when a bewildered Sûreté wondered how the safe had been tampered with. By this apparent magic he whisked two hundred thousand francs from the burglar-proof safe of the Lille Crédit Lyonnais. He raided the offices of the biggest firm of safe-and-vault manufacturers in Paris, who boasted in advertisements that their wares were impregnable, and opened every safe in their show-rooms before he rifled the president's vault of a million in bonds.

It was Flamande who first used thermit to open a safe: who first used a microphone to listen to the fall of the tumblers. It was Flamande who stole De Ruyter's emeralds in Antwerp; and who, when a comb-cordon of police was drawn round the country, nevertheless smuggled those emeralds out. They were concealed, in fact, under the fur of a great Newfoundland dog in the suite of the King of Belgium.

I could do no more than glance at Evelyn's notes. But out of them emerged a figure who combined two Latin extremes: a man who loved a flourish of audacity and spectacular devilment for its own sake, but who was at the same time hard-headed, slippery, and cruel as Satan.

The more I read, the more I became furiously convinced that I might have some grounds for thinking it had been Flamande who pinched my passport that evening. This Gasquet might be all very well, but I should like to see a duel between Flamande and Sir Henry Merrivale. You couldn't help admiring the fellow. All the same, from personal reasons, I would have given my right hand to do him down.

When I went downstairs, the storm had broken across the white forest of lamps in the Place de la Concorde; Paris had lost its night-shimmer under a bucketing deluge of water whose lightning had an ominous fire. It did not look like an ordinary spring storm, and we had seventy-five miles to go. I carry an international license, so I drove. We struck across the Pont des Invalides to leave Paris by the Versailles gate. It was ticklish work in that hooting traffic; we were both silent. Evelyn, who had taken off her hat and donned a waterproof, spoke at last.

"You read about ——?"

"Yes."

"What do you think?"

"He's strong poison. What bothers me is whether this Gasquet is any match for him."

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" 'M. I thought so. That's because you've read only one side of the evidence. If you had heard about Gasquet, you'd be ready to put your money on him. He's the sort who collars a murderer with an epigram and bows politely before he fires. He caught that powdered-glass murderer — well, he's as flamboyant as the other, in exactly the same way, and it ought to be a battle of the giants. If I didn't have that feeling . . . that it's much more horribly dangerous than we ever thought . . . well, I could enjoy all this enormously. Here we go a-whizzing, nobody knows where or why or when we'll get back," — she made a pleased gesture — "on a dark road to dark doings, you see? But why is the whole thing *so* dark? Neither you nor I have any idea at all what we're to do, and it's the first time I've known even H.M. to go so far as that. Why is Sir George Ramsden required to come to Paris, and then immediately run down to a little inn near Orléans? . . . H'm. Ramsden! So far as I've been able to find out, discreetly, he's rather a swell in the Foreign Office. Do you know him?"

I did know him; quite well, as it happened. He was conspicuous as a sporting baronet, but that was not his real work, and very few people knew how closely he was associated with the Foreign Office. Ramsden was a good man. He was one of those under-cover diplomats who work without (known) official sanction and do more good for the empire than any fanfare. Short, fat, and peppery, he had the mannerisms of a comic-paper colonel. He liked the ladies, he liked whiskey and a fling at the baccarat tables and any kind of sport. But he could be British with the British, Moslem with the Moslems, and, for all I know, Zulu with the Zulus; because he always got the business quietly done. If Sir George had been entrusted to bring the unicorn to London, then the unicorn was devilish important.

"In which case," I added, "it seems to me we're neglecting the obvious lead if we want to find out what Whitehall is up to. Ramsden got to Marseilles yesterday. Where did he come from?"

"From Athens."

"Athens? Trouble there?"

She reflected. "Plenty of trouble, old boy, but nothing that concerns us. Or that concerns Ramsden either, so far as I can find out. He has been on a holiday in Athens. That's all anybody seems to know."

For the moment we gave it up. I had to watch the road, which was none of the best when we left Paris by the Versailles gate and bumped up through

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cobbled villages with the river on our right. Instead of decreasing, the storm grew more lurid and thunder-split.

Nothing was on the road except a red Voisin, which passed us in the same direction just outside Rambouillet, and rocketed by at a clip that roused Evelyn's suspicions. But we lost it in the Forest, or else it turned off. Just outside Chartres the road abruptly dropped — it is the worst bit I know — and went down like a chute to the narrow entrance between the squat round-towers in the walls. Then I could have sworn I saw the red Voisin again, but I had to concentrate on letting our car have its head in a downward plunge through that gate, or we should have fetched up over the parapet into the Eure. Inside we banged onto cobbles again. Beyond the miry windscreen I could see an open *bistro*, and headed for it after a hot drink.

"We've still got twenty miles to go," said Evelyn, who was fiercely trying to puzzle out the map, "even for Orléans. And to find an inn on the other side . . . Look here, there must be a shorter route! Ask them!"

Inside the hot *bistro*, a few frowsy wax-work figures were playing dominoes over their drinks in a damp fog of tobacco-smoke. The proprietor, as he pushed across two steaming glasses of coffee and rum, was helpful. He sketched out a short route for me on the bar. Evelyn and I gulped our drinks, and bumped down again from the old town with its lush meadows and its cracked spires.

"Got it!" said Evelyn, after some minutes' scanning the map. "This is the way through Levai — the way we should have taken to begin with. Two more kilometers, and we ought to come out on the Loire river just below Orléans. There's a little bridge marked. Near it, this says, there's a backwater in the river and a place called the Château de l'Ile. That ought to be a landmark." She was peering ahead. We were on a long downward slope through a sodden patch of woods, with thick banks on either side and towards our right a steep gully. Evelyn rubbed the windscreen futilely on the inside. "If that château's a big place, we ought to be able to pick up . . . *Look out!*"

Round the bend and down, a red shape flashed out with blurred darkness against the headlights. I saw the Voisin pulled up broadside along the road, not thirty feet ahead, even before I saw the flashlight that somebody was waving like a lantern. Brake and clutch bumped the floor, and I yanked the hand-brake down hard. We felt the helpless swing of a skid, a bright flash of rain like the glimpse of a wreck; whirled right, left, right again, and slid like a man on skis. Something jolted. The car rocked up on two wheels, and came

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down safe with its back wheels against the right-hand bank. I turned to look at Evelyn, who was white. The engine had stalled. There was no noise but our hard breathing, and the rain.

"One moment, please," said a voice like that of a polite secretary.

Something moved outside the blurred side-curtain. A hand reached under it and turned the catch of the door.

CHAPTER THREE

BEFORE I COULD MOVE the door creaked open. Against the rain and the black woods, I could see only a shape; but I *thought* I recognized that voice, though the rain muffled it and even the French syllables were not clear.

"What the hell do you mean by this?" I said in English, with a shout which was as much frayed nerves as anything else. "What ——"

"English," said the voice in that language, and in a way that might or might not have sounded like relief. It quickened. "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

Yes, that voice spoke remarkable English. I was looking out of the corner of my eye at the red touring-car in the road ahead. It was not quite drawn across; with a narrow squeeze, you might get past on the left.

"No. The question is, who are *you*, and why do you try to wreck people's cars?"

"Whoever I am," said the man, "I hold authority from the French police. There are two *agents* waiting in that car ahead." He moved forward, and I saw that he had something in his hand. "Get out of that car. I want to see your passport."

"You got one passport off me this evening. Isn't that enough?"

"Get out of that car. Now."

He moved closer, coming into the faint glow of the dash-board lamps, to move his wrist back and forth and show the gleam of black metal in his hand. But he should never have done that, because it showed that his gun looked too much like tin. If he pulled the trigger of that small automatic, the top of the barrel would rise gracefully; nothing more. We were being threatened, in fact, with a cigarette-case. And before me, at arm's length, was Flamande.

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Now, I am far from being of the courageous sort; but, with a dummy pistol sternly pointed at my chest, I could tell even Flamande to go soak his head in the Loire. But first we had to find out what our host was trying to do. While I obediently climbed out of the car into the rain, Evelyn was giving a shrill and excellent impersonation of an outraged tourist. His flashlight was flickering over our car.

"Really, my good man," she said, "even in a country swarming with nasty foreigners, this is the worst insult I shall have to report yet to the British consul. My cousin and I were going to Orléans ——"

"You get out, too," interposed the other, in that colorless voice which I was beginning to find eerie and ugly. "Stand beside him. Keep in the light, both of you. *You*," he looked at me, "put your hands up."

There was such a tired contempt in his tone that my temper went to the boil. But up went my hands. He had switched on his flashlight again, putting the beam in our eyes.

"Now you'll talk. Who are you?"

"Kenwood Blake. London. I'm a tea-importer."

"Do you pose as a member of Department C5 of the British Intelligence Service?"

"No."

"You," he spoke to Evelyn. "Feel in his pocket and get me his passport, if he has any. If he hasn't, we'll take him along to Orléans and have him locked up. Don't argue with me, you. Do as I tell you."

"How do I know where he keeps his passport?" asked Evelyn. "I'm a respectable woman."

Momentarily his light snapped towards her.

"*Shut up, you God damned traitor*," he said to Evelyn — and then I went for him with a rugby tackle.

The man must have thought I had gone out of my head. For, you see, the thing wasn't a dummy pistol. I discovered that, with one of the worst shocks of my life, when the dummy exploded about two inches above my ear, and the flash singed the brim of my felt hat.

The rest was confused; it still is in my mind. I remember hearing the bullet hit the side of our car, just before my left shoulder caught the fellow above the knee. I missed a clean tackle in the slipperiness of the mud, and saved my life. But he had instinctively jumped backwards towards the bank; this gave us

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impetus, and we sailed. He couldn't have known we were so close to the bank. The beam from his flashlight spun up into his own face, showing something that gleamed like silver in his mouth, and which he almost swallowed. It was a police-whistle.

We must have fallen only a few feet — he was on the bottom, and got most of the thud when we struck, for the breath went out of him like a bellows — but we rolled several yards more. I struggled loose and groped up to my knees. But through a singing head hammered one terrible thought:

Crooks don't carry police-whistles. Good God, who is this fellow? And, incidentally, where are the police?

What partly quieted the beehive in my head, and stopped the bank from spinning, was the flashlight. It had accompanied us. It lay in an angle of the log, sending a valiant beam from the other side of my adversary. He was spread-eagled on his back, his thumbs turned upwards from bent arms, his mouth open, and his bowler hat crushed over one side.

I was so dizzy that I nearly went over when I bent to pick up the light. But there was nothing to fear when I examined the man. He was not dead; he was not even hurt, except for a bump on the head which had knocked him out. Who the devil was he? His face looked English. It was large, square, unprepossessing: a man of forty-odd, with jowls and a brown toothbrush mustache. Why did he say, "You God damned traitor?"

Then I saw, under his open waterproof, what had tumbled out of his inside pocket. It was a small, square, grayish roll which he had fastened round under the clip of a fountain-pen. That slip bears the white cross on blue, your number and your chief's, the F.O.'s seal superimposed; but it is impossible to forge these things, because a member of the service knows this slip by its texture as a blank-clerk knows a good note. I knew this right enough. The man was a member of the British Intelligence Department.

More, I suddenly saw, he was the man Evelyn had really been intended to meet at Lemoine's. Holy gray angels, what a mess! And, when he saw me go away with her ——

All this, you understand, took a matter of seconds. Even above the downpour I heard voices far at the top of the bank. Two bull's-eye lanterns flashed white beams out over my head. Up there were the headlights of our car, and past them in silhouette ran a figure in the flat-topped cap and short waterproof of a policeman. My adversary had been telling the truth; there really had been

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two policemen waiting at that red car, and now they were on the view-halloo bellow after me. The trouble seemed to be that they could not spot the place where we had gone pinwheeling over into the gully. And, since from the road it looked like a black ravine, they were probably not anxious to make a blind leap over. No explanations were going to suffice — I should have to get out of this as best I could.

"You're not hurt, are you?" cried a small voice at my elbow, and something rose up in my throat. "You're not hurt? Sh-h! I slid down the bank behind you, or they'd have had me."

Evelyn ducked down quickly beside our unconscious friend, and gripped my arm.

"Turn off that light," she whispered. "Ken, I don't know exactly what it is, but we seem to have made some kind of awful mistake. We — look out! They've caught the light."

"They have. But hang on to my arm and we may both get out of this. No, wait! Stay here with the corpse. I'll draw 'em away with the light. When they come after me, scramble up that bank and run for it in the car. Don't argue, dammit! If I can get away from 'em, I'll pinch theirs and follow you."

The spirit of larceny, you perceive, was flaming brightly. I broke loose and stampeded through a whipping film of silver birches, the yells and the lights following me along the upper bank. Round my head in a wheel I swung the beam of my own torch.

By their howl it was obvious that this had fetched them. They risked their luck and jumped from the edge. One came a cropper, but the other found that the descent was really easy and plunged like a landslide. I propped my light in the crook of a tree, facing towards them, as though I had turned at bay; then I doubled back and up the bank as quietly as possible.

Evelyn had not gone. She was sitting at the wheel of the two-seater, its engine running when I tumbled in beside her and slammed the door. While I gurgled for breath after that chase, we wormed out past the red car, shifted quickly, and tore off with a screeching of gears down the road.

"Why didn't you go on, wench? Why didn't ——"

"Go on? I like that! Besides, how would you have followed me? Not in that red Voisin, I can tell you. That old devil you knocked out still had his gun in his hand. So I simply pinched it and put a bullet through each of their tires.

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You don't want them to follow us, do you? And now they can't. The gun's on the seat behind you."

"Listen," I said, and took the plunge. "There's something I've got to tell you now. This is much more serious than you think. It's about — well — you know the identification-cards of the Service? That is — uh ——"

I nearly flunked it. Then she pointed at me triumphantly.

"I know what you're going to say, old boy. And you can thank me for saving your bacon. You're going to say that in the fight with that chap your identification-card fell out of your pocket and you thought it got lost? Well, darling, it didn't. It fell beside the old devil. I saw it lying there when you had your light on him. So I picked it up when you left. And," said Evelyn, producing the real agent's fountain-pen with the gray slip still wound under the catch, "here it is back again."

This was the end.

"Look here," I said, when I could find coherent words. "I wonder — that is, *he* didn't see you pick it up, did he? He didn't know you found it? He hadn't come to, of course?"

"Yes, he was coming to. There was enough light from the car up on the road to see that. I was afraid he would grab me or go after you. So I simply landed him one on the head with the butt of that gun, and he relapsed again. He was making a grab for me, you know."

I said nothing; there was nothing to say. I was so deeply in trouble that I had to play the hand. I couldn't explain to Evelyn now. The only course was to accept the identification card, and *be* the Intelligence agent until the "unicorn" mission was over.

"They'll have to walk it, of course," Evelyn was saying. "And we've got enough of a start before they can turn in an alarm. From where we had that row, it was about two kilometers to the bridge where we're to cross the Loire. We must be nearly there. Orléans is on the opposite bank, about four kilometers up the river. They'll either go there after they've crossed, or follow straight on our own track until they find a telegraph office. . . . I say, look at that map again! There's no village near our inn, is there? I mean, where they could 'phone or telegraph? If they drop into our own tavern ——"

"It isn't likely our inn will have a telephone," I said, "but, good God! It is likely they'll drop in to find out. Unless we can bribe somebody to say we're not there . . ."

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Then my dull wits met the insuperable difficulty, and I swore. The fat was flaring and sizzling in the fire now. Not only were we headed for that inn, *but so was the real Intelligence man.* He, like Evelyn, would have had his instructions to go there. And, if I tried to outface him and swear he was an impostor, he had the police to corroborate him. But we had got to get to our rendezvous. . . .

"Ken!" I woke up to the fact that Evelyn was crying out, and that we were skidding dangerously. "Don't you *hear* anything?"

"It sounds like water, and pretty swift water. You said we were near the river."

"No, no! Behind us. It's like a motor. Don't you hear it? Suppose they've been picked up by a car?"

I opened the door to peer out. We were coming down through what seemed to be low, rolling meadows to the river, for you could hear its sullen, tumultuous rushing ahead. Some distance towards the right, where the ground looked flat, I thought I could discern lights among trees. It was a big building of some sort, though, oddly enough, the lights seemed to be reflected on water. The château Evelyn had mentioned, of course . . . on an island in a backwater there. We must be nearly to the bridge. I stuck my head up over our hood to look towards the left. Very faint and far away up on the farther bank of the river there was a pale twinkling. That was Orléans. And now we were flying straight down for a bridge whose location we did not know.

But I could hear the "motor" now. It was no car. That noise beat and throbbed with such sudden loudness over our heads, and seemed so close, that I involuntarily ducked. It gave a spit, fizzled away, pounded out again with increased loudness, and swept away to return again.

The one remaining motor could not have been two hundred feet above us. It was a passenger plane, and it was in trouble. First I could pick out the red port wing-light; then it disappeared into a black circling shape and a sickly flutter of a cough.

Evelyn spoke calmly.

"Hang on," she said. "I hope we can stop without turning over. There's no bridge ahead."

True enough. We were into water now, for the swollen river had flooded out its banks. A broad mud runway seemed to end in a gap between the white palings, beyond which surged white flickers of the Loire turned to a mill-race. But we did not shoot straight out into a cold bath, because the water itself checked

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us. The car sent up two waves like a torpedo, which slashed back on us just before the wheels sank in mud and churned to a stop at the top of the incline. Our headlights were full on the gap. Now it was obvious why Evelyn's instructions had been to go by the main road and not by this short-cut. There had never, *pace* the map-makers, been any bridge here. We could see the steel cables of a ferry, but no barge on this side. A big notice-board made defiant announcement that never would this ferry march after nineteen o'clock.

Which trapped us. The river, a good two hundred yards wide, was the only way we could go. There was no other road except backwards where the pursuers lay. And, in addition to the fact that our carburetor seemed flooded, it would need another car and a rope to yank us out of this mire. We were bogged and sunk. The lads from the red car had us in a blind alley.

Evelyn began to laugh.

"I really don't see what we can do," she declared, rather hysterically. "We're not going to make that appointment at the inn now. We can't even go back and run the gauntlet. What I want now is a hot bath and change."

"Listen, wench. We're not going to be beaten now. We can take to the brush. There's a château over the way there. Then, if they do get on our track . . ."

"Yes," agreed Evelyn. "And here they come now."

I kicked open the door and stepped out into water that was well over our running-board. Headlights jumped round a bend at the top of the slope, and a car came bucketing down towards us at a speed about twice our own. I swallowed hard.

"What are we going to do?" demanded Evelyn, cool again. "We've got a gun, of course. But, wait! I've got it!" She slid out beside me. "They may not know there's no bridge. They simply see us here. If we stand out and wave to them, they may shoot past us into the river; or at least they'll get stuck in the mud like us, and we'll be on an even footing again."

There was time for nothing but to act instinctively on the suggestion. I craned round from inside the car, shouting and beckoning — and the enemy came on.

My gestures had just the opposite effect. The driver of that car must have interpreted them as a warning, or else he saw the open gap just in time. I don't know precisely what happened, for the headlights were blinding. There was a grind and slam; the glare of headlights spun and flashed past, nearly at a dead halt, and a tidal wave swept in on us. The morass bogged that car when it was

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ahead of us only a few feet from the edge. But there was time to see that the car was a Citroen taxi, and that the car contained two people — neither of whom looked at all like our pursuers. It was almost broadside-on ahead of us. Then the side-window went down with a bang.

A heavy fist was shaken at us from the window. Blinking at us behind spectacles down on its nose, with an ancient top-hat knocked to one side by the window, there peered at us the furious face of Sir Henry Merrivale.

CHAPTER FOUR

"HULLO, H.M.," said Evelyn meekly.

"Cheer-ho, Mycroft," said I.

He suddenly cocked his head. "Who was that last? *Hey?* Who? Speak up! Who said that? — Ken *Blake?* Good God, what're *you* doin' here?"

"Special service, H.M.," I told him. "I'm taking somebody's place, for the moment. But what are you doing here?"

At this point there was an interruption, in hoarse and anguished tones, which seemed to proceed from the taxi-driver.

"Blast your beautiful taxi!" roared H.M. "If there's any damage done, I'll buy it from you. You know, *acheter — l'argent* — the whole goddam cab. Got it, Marcel?"

"Ah, *ça!*" breathed Marcel with satisfaction. He was a philosopher. He sat back comfortably and lit a cigarette while Evelyn appealed:

"Now that you're here, I expect it'll be all right. But will you please, please tell us what's going on; what we're expected to do and what all this is about? We've got into the most horrible messes, we don't know what we're doing. Exactly what were we to do, anyhow?"

"Uh-huh," H.M. nodded. "That's what I want to know myself. That's one of the reasons I followed you."

"What you want to know?" I repeated. "But, good Lord, doesn't the head of the whole Department know ——?"

He howled me down with some obscure remarks about ingratitude from the so-and-so's, and not taking his advice; then he went on:

"Humph. The one thing I can tell you, the only thing those swine at the

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Home Office would tell me is that whatever you were intended to do, it's been canceled. And if you, my gal," he pointed at Evelyn, "had stayed at your hotel five minutes longer tonight, you'd have got the telegram cancelling it. It's a mix-up exactly like the Home Office would make, when they took it out of my hands — and I'm here to *fix* 'em. I came over to Paris just for that. I went to your hotel to find you, but they said you'd just gone. So . . . Looky here. That earwig of a car you got is gettin' flooded out. You must be up to your ankles. Come on over here with me, and I'll tell you what I do know, and we'll see if we can't work out a plan to fry them Home Office bunglers in their own grease. I got some whiskey here," he added helpfully.

I lifted Evelyn out and splashed across to the other car, where H.M. had turned on the roof-light in the rear. Marcel was spinning the engine, in a forlorn hope of extricating the taxi, but he got not even a cough. H.M. sat piled into one corner, his unwieldy tall hat stuck on one side of his head to avoid collision with the roof; his big coat open to disclose the fact that he had again forgotten his necktie. There were sour lines drawn down from the corners of his broad nose; he blinked over his spectacles, and in one hand he held a thermos-flask and in the other a bottle of whiskey. His presence was sanity and reassurance.

"How do you figure in this business, Ken?" he growled. "The people they'd chosen for this job were the Cheyne gal here and Harvey Drummond."

"Who's Harvey Drummond?"

"Officially, feller who owns the string of race-horses. Also, he's the ex-Cambridge boxer who brags he can put to sleep anybody his own weight in less'n three rounds. Nasty customer, Ken. He ——"

"I mean, what does he look like?"

H.M. sniffed. "Heavy-set feller. Thick jowls. Brown toothbrush mustache. Reddish complexion ——"

I looked at Evelyn, and saw horrified understanding in her eyes. That was the man who was howling somewhere behind us. I turned quickly to H.M.

"By the way, didn't you notice anything on the road before you got here? Didn't you meet anybody, for instance?"

"Aha, and that's another thing!" cried H.M., ghoulishly embarked on more grievances. "Feller tried to hold me up. Not two miles back there he tried to hold me up. Tryin' games on *me!* When we wouldn't stop, one biggish feller tried to jump on the running-board ——"

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"What did you do?"

H.M. blinked with sour pleasure. "Me? Oh, I just leaned out through the window and gave him a push in the face. We were traveling pretty fast then, and he went across the road like he'd been fired out of a pub. In fact, I shouldn't be surprised if he went clear over the edge of the bank. . . . The noise that went up from his confederates was the most awful thing I ever heard, but we didn't stop to investigate. Uh-huh. It was a good shove."

"Now we're all in it," I said. "That's the second time he's sailed over that bank tonight, and his temper must be in a ripe state by now. Before we go on, H.M., I want you to listen to the story of my derelictions."

I made a full, if brief, confession, while H.M. shut the panel against a hurt Marcel. Although I had expected some outburst from H.M., he sat silent, twiddling his thumbs, the fish-like eyes fixed on me.

It was only when I came to the affair of the red car that H.M. exploded. "O, Gawd lummy!" he breathed. "You mean it was Drummond you . . . uh-huh. And so did I. But I don't envy you, son. You've picked one of the worst people in England to make an enemy of. Ken, when he catches up to you, he's goin' to *murder* you. He's poison."

I was uneasily conscious of this. "All the same, we shall have to go back there and pick 'em up now . . ."

"Ain't you satisfied yet?" asked H.M. "No. Seems to me we're all three outlaws together, in more ways than one. Lemme explain. The real reason why I came chargin' over to France to begin with was to get Flamande."

"Flamande? But why? It isn't your pigeon, is it?"

"Oh, yes, it is, son. Because the Home Office said I couldn't. Because they thought this fancy joker would be too smart for the old man.

"Here's how the situation stands. Last Wednesday old Sq — well, we'll mention no names; somebody from the Home Office, anyhow — rang me up and said, 'Merrivale, I'm instructed to give you some orders.' 'Oho,' I said, 'and since when have you been giving me orders?' 'Let's not have any argument,' he says. 'Our office happens to be the head of the police, and this in its own way is a police job. We want to borrow two of your agents, Miss Cheyne and Mr. Drummond, for a French mission.'

"Haah! Y'know, children, I hadn't even time to get mad. I said, 'Is that so, now? What mission, and who's managing it?' He said, 'George Ramsden's been sent on a mission, and he's just comin' back. Ramsden absolutely refuses ever to

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travel with any guard. So we want to put two people close to him, unbeknownst, to watch. The French government thinks Flamande is going to take an interest in Ramsden, and if our two departments workin' together can both protect Ramsden and nail Flamande for Gasquet, then there's goin' to be considerable bay-leaves crownin' both countries."

"But what about the unicorn, and the mission to this 'Blind Man' inn?" asked Evelyn. "Do you know about those?"

"I don't know. But," said H.M., "I can give a thunderin' good guess. At noon today, I got a phone-call from the same feller. Says he: 'Ah, Merrivale! It's been decided that we shall not need your agents after all. We don't know where Drummond is, but Miss Cheyne is at the Meurice in Paris. Will you see whether you can get in touch with them and tell 'em the mission has been canceled?'

"Uh. Well. I made a decision spur-o'-the-moment. 'No, I won't,' says I, 'but I'll tell you what I will do. I'm hoppin' over to Paris this afternoon, and I'm goin' to offer you Flamande on toast within forty-eight hours. How do you like that, hey?' He says, 'You've been warned not to interfere! You've got absolutely no authority, and you'll get none.' 'Squiffy,' I says, 'you can take your goddam authority —' and I told him just what to do with it, and hung up while he was still bleatin'.

"I got the afternoon plane and spent the journey over in sittin' and thinkin'. I knew I'd get no help from the French prefecture. But I had a theory. My first move was to try to get in touch with you, gal, to find out your instructions — that's why I came a-chasin' after you with Marcel here. I got on your track when they said at the hotel you were goin' to Orléans. At Chartres I picked you up again from a bar where you asked directions about a short-cut. And now, after bein' nearly murdered for my pains, I find you didn't have any instructions that could help me at all. No lead! No clew!"

I reflected.

"We may be a defensive alliance of outlaws," I said. "But we seem to be pretty thoroughly sunk at the start — at least, so far as getting after Flamande is concerned. Did you know, for instance, that Ramsden was coming to Paris by the evening plane from Marseilles? And that Flamande had threatened to be aboard?"

H.M. kept his face very wooden to conceal the fact that he had lost his first trick. He did not even roar.

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"No, I didn't. D'ye think I'd have come chasing down into the wilds after you if I'd known that plane was to reach Paris not a very long time after I left it?"

Evelyn mused, her chin in her hand. "So — unless it's been delayed by the storm, that plane must have reached Paris some time ago. And here we are, stuck in the mud miles from the battlefield where . . . what's that?"

It was almost a cry. What she heard was the aëroplane motor again, lower now and blowing out full blast. H.M. remained staring straight ahead for what seemed a very long time. Then, with a muttered exclamation, he switched out the roof-light and peered against the window.

At first we could see nothing. The noise had abruptly stopped; the engine was switched off. Then, a few hundred feet above the flat meadows towards our right — and not many hundred yards away beyond the poplars that fringed the road — two straight shafts of light slanted down from either side of the air-liner's cabin. She had switched on her landing-lights. She was circling down to a forced landing in those meadows.

"Y'know," said H.M., in a detached voice, "I thought Flamande might be up to a trick or two like that. I thought he might be going to see to it that that plane never got to Paris. I'll be very much surprised if that ain't the Marseilles-Paris bus. Maybe delayed by storm, or hanky-panky, or anything you like. With George Ramsden aboard. With Gasquet aboard — and Flamande. Burn me, the cards are arrangin' themselves. I'm goin' to play poker, son. With both Gasquet and Flamande, and never know which is which. I hope that plane don't crash; that's all I hope."

It did not crash. We saw the landing-lights swoop in a last plunge and glide; dip below the trees, and flicker beyond the poplar-stems. They flattened out and then joggled to a long run before they stopped. There was a pause. Then the cabin-windows glowed out yellow in the meadow.

"Done it," breathed H.M. with ghoulish jocularity. "Shall we join 'em? I got a fancy to see what innocent travelers are on that bus."

Down he lumbered into the flood. I had the foresight to borrow a flashlight from Marcel, but except for the mud the going was easy. We slogged across a nearly flat meadow whose confines were lost in mist. To our left, along the river bank, we could see lights.

But our attention was on the stranded plane. Its door had opened; a violent argument seemed in progress among a group of people gathered about it. As we

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watched, four people detached themselves from the group and moved off towards our left. These, we could see as they passed the windows, were three men and a woman. The others continued to wrangle by the door. There were three more passengers, men; in addition there were two men wearing the uniform of the airline, and one with the white coat of a steward. H.M. lifted his great voice through the rain.

"Hallo! Is that," he bellowed in French, "the Marseilles-Paris plane?"

Every person spun round; the voices ceased as at the shutting of a lid. The passengers became crooked silhouettes, straining back from an unknown voice that caught them unawares. One of the men in uniform stood sideways on the light from the door, and I saw his hand whip to his pocket.

"It is!" he roared back. "Who goes there?"

"Friends, friends! English. Travelers. We had an accident."

Another pause, while sheets of rain whirled across between. Then one of the group on our left, a stocky short man with his neck thrust out, took a few steps forward.

"English, eh?" he demanded in that language. "Who the devil are you, then? Don't try any games. We're armed."

H.M. chuckled. "Ho *ho!*" he said. "I know that voice. Howdy, Ramsden. Don't get the wind up. This ain't Flamande, you know; it's Merrivale — Henry Merrivale. I got a couple of friends with me."

"By God, it is!" shouted Sir George Ramsden, as though with a sort of jumpy aside. "Hold hard, everybody; I know this fellow. He's all right."

While H.M. slogged up to meet Ramsden, whom Evelyn and I also greeted, I tried to study the seven passengers, but it was too dark to distinguish their faces. I had an impression that — with one exception — they were all either English or American. The exception was a middle-sized, rather fussy gentleman who had the stiff bearing of the French professional man. Meantime, there was Ramsden making his usual short, quick, hammering gestures like a steam-piston, sniffing the air as though he sniffed trouble, and peering round as his high voice bleated on:

"— smack down miles from anywhere. It's the blasted nuisance of it that annoys me. And, while I don't give that," he snapped his fingers, "for this Edgar Wallace crook and his threats, I do want to be comfortable. See there, where those lights are?" He pointed towards the left. "The pilot says that's some big pot's château, and that he'll probably give us shelter until we can

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start again." He addressed the pilot in excellent French. "Tell me, then, exactly what is wrong, and how long will it be before we can go on?"

The uniformed shoulders shrugged. "Ah! Monsieur sees that it depends. The engine-trouble can be put right, yes, but we are not equipped for blind flying. Until the mist lifts, then . . . well, we shall try to put the trouble right."

The tall Englishman by the door of the plane, who had been struggling to light a cigarette, looked up sharply. He only said to Ramsden:

"You people carry on to the château, sir. We'll follow if they seem hospitably inclined."

"Right," said another English voice near him, and the French professional man in the plane nodded. We trudged away with the other four, leaving the sound of some sort of altercation behind. The one woman among the passengers, who had her arm through that of a man in a rakish traveling-cap, was eying Evelyn curiously. Since we were supposed to have had an accident, Ramsden was making clucking noises over Evelyn and being very gallant even though he could not see her. His jovial spirits warmed even that bleak place. I think we all felt better by the time we came in sight of the château. Only the last member of the party, a portly man whom Ramsden addressed as Hayward, had a tendency to stumble and swear.

When the grove of beeches opened out and gave place to a screen of willows, the Château de l'Ile did not seem so much on an island as built straight out of the water itself. At this point the Loire made a deep inward curve, so that the château was a good sixty yards from any bank. A graveled carriage-drive, whose beginning we could not see, terminated in a high stone causeway across the gap. The overflowing river frothed white and roared round that island like a private tempest. The château was not actually a big place, but the conical peaks of its towers loomed gigantic in the rain, and the deep embrasures of its windows made remote the lights on the lower floor. We struggled across the causeway, where it made you dizzy to look down. A low flight of steps led up to a big door; and, just as we set foot on the steps, an arch of light appeared on the darkness as the door opened.

"Please come in, messieurs," intoned a courteous voice. "The Comte d'Andrieu has been expecting you."

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE BIG DOOR thudded shut against the wind. We were in a high stone hallway with a fretted roof; so arched and bare, with a row of stone pillars down each side, that it looked like the nave of a small cathedral. The stone was blackening, and not too well preserved against the damp. But a clean strip of red carpet was laid down the middle, terminating in a big stairway at the far end.

"He expects us?" Ramsden's startled voice was repeating behind. "Oh! I understand. You mean you saw us come down out there?"

"No, monsieur," the other replied blandly. He swam into my sight as a big man with a large mustache and brilliantined hair; he wore somewhat shoddy evening dress, and an air of tolerant composure. "I mean that monseigneur has been expecting you since yesterday."

"Precisely. You will perhaps," a new voice interposed in English, "permit me to explain?"

I had not seen our host come downstairs. But he was advancing up the red carpet; moving slowly, and giving us a polite scrutiny which was less a stare than a gesture of welcome. A lean man of probably sixty-odd, whose walk was saved from a dodder only by the humor in his eyes and the ease of his bearing. The eyes had a bright dark twinkle under pouched lids; there were wrinkles of amusement round them, and also in the forehead, as though he had a habit of lifting one eyebrow. His hair and clipped military beard were dark gray, but the mustache under a bony nose was still blackish.

Said he: "Have no apprehension, my friends. This is not a trap of any sort, and I am not Flamande. Ha ha, no! My name is D'Andrieu. All I know of this situation is contained in the letter I had the honor to receive from M. Flamande himself. Er — which of you is Sir George Ramsden?"

Ramsden, whose boiled eye had been wandering about the hall, gave an almost guilty jump.

"Hoomf!" he said. "I am. Excuse me, sir; but, dammit, man, how do you know all that?"

"This letter will explain. Will you translate it aloud?"

Ramsden took the sheet of notepaper our host handed him. He glanced down the sheet, and his sandy eyebrows went up under the brim of a dripping hat.

"I say, of all the infernal impudence —! *Listen!*

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" 'MONSEIGNEUR:

" 'The name of M. le Comte d'Andrieu has always been known to me as that of a man who in the past enjoyed the stalking of wild game. In case he is still interested, I can offer M. le Comte some excellent sport. I can offer him a unicorn-hunt.

" 'Permit me to explain. This evening I have learned that a place has been taken on to-morrow night's Marseilles-Paris aëroplane for one Sir George Ramsden, an Englishman whose good heart I esteem, but at mention of whose intelligence I do not always spontaneously rise to cheer. . . .' "

"The letter, you see," our host put in, rather hurriedly, "was posted last night at Marseilles."

" 'Rise to cheer —' " prompted H.M. "Uh-huh. Go on, Ramsden. What else?"

" 'I am interested in Sir George and what he brings with him. Therefore I have taken a place on the same aëroplane.

" 'I have given much thought to its real stopping-place, and have at last chosen the isolated region near your esteemed château. At the proper time I shall take measures to ensure a forced landing. Since there is no other house within some distance, we shall probably call upon you. There I shall have time in which to work, although no great time is, of course, ever necessary to me. May I ask you, then, to have a light meal in readiness for the travelers?

" 'One thing, monsieur, I deeply regret. Among the passengers of this aëroplane, themselves doubtless dull enough, there is likely to be one of such conspicuous dullness that I should not inflict him on you if I had not half a mind to kill him. This is a fellow of low origins, calling himself Gasquet. I am not able, at this moment, to inform you what clumsy disguise this person is likely to adopt. But you will easily recognize him, monsieur, by the revolting size of his ears, by his mean, close-set eyes and shifty mouth, and by a nose which at twenty paces is almost indistinguishable from a tomato. . . .' "

The young man in the traveling-cap — the other American — began to laugh. The woman, or girl, with him seemed disturbed. The letter both puzzled and bewildered her. So far as I could judge now, she was probably Viennese. She was small, with the high breasts, very transparent skin, and dark red mouth

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of the Viennese. Having intense blue eyes and dark hair, she was by way of being a beauty. As the man laughed, she said something to him — rebukingly, it sounded — in German.

"All right, Elsa," he conceded, subsiding to a grin. "All I can say is, I should like to see a reply written by Gasquet."

Our host's wrinkled eyes continued to twinkle. "And so you shall, sir, if you wish it."

"You mean you got a letter from Gasquet, too?"

"It came this afternoon. I find them an extraordinary and amusing pair of — of" — he snapped his fingers — "micawbers. Also, I forget my manners. The ladies must be very uncomfortable. Please forgive an old campaigner. I seldom entertain but you will find M. Flamande's 'light repast' laid out for you. If you would care for a bath and change, my house is at your disposal. My servants can bring your luggage ——"

Ramsden stared. "You mean to say you followed that fellow's requests to the letter? And you didn't even communicate with the police about *this?*"

D'Andrieu frowned. "Certainly not, except insofar as he directs in the last paragraph. You have not finished it? Permit me." He took the letter from Ramsden's hands.

" 'Although I should prefer that you did not communicate with the local police, my acquaintance with their intelligence is such that I do not anticipate any grave difficulties. However, if you wish it, I have no objection to your communicating with the person Gasquet. I would wish him to have advance news of his defeat. Be so good as to write him — if you care to make the defeat more exciting — c/o the Sûreté both at Marseilles and Paris to make sure of finding him. To-night I write to the newspapers, saying that I shall be aboard that aëroplane to-morrow. He will see that. But for his private information you may tell him all I have told you.

" 'Say to him, then: To-morrow the great Flamande will ride with Sir George Ramsden. He will wreck the night air-liner by the Château de l'Ile outside Orléans, he will steal the unicorn, kill any fool who gets in his way, and vanish as he has always done. You know when he will strike and where he will strike. *Now stop him — if you can.*

FLAMANDE.' "

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"He's a conceited old villain, right enough," Evelyn said meditatively; "all the same, I'd rather like to meet him."

Hayward cleared his throat and intervened pontifically. He said:

"My friends, my friends! Let us talk sense. That lad has got his nerve right with him," a gleam of unwilling admiration shone in his eye, "but your Flamande can't work witchcraft. Now, I ask you: Can he? And how can anybody tell exactly where a plane is going to go bust and come down, eh? Unless he bribed the pilot. Hell! That's not cleverness; it's plain dirty work that anybody might have managed, and it makes me mad to think we've been delayed just by . . ."

"And yet," said H.M., "I doubt it. First place, the co-pilot and probably the steward would've had to be in on the game. And has Flamande, the lone wolf, ever worked like that? Too bloomin' risky by half, I'd say, by the look of those fellers ——"

"You and your friends, sir," asked D'Andrieu, looking at Evelyn and me, "were not aboard the plane, then?"

"No. We had a bit of a motor-accident. H'mf. Second place, I do a good deal of moochin' about. I happen to remember the crew of that plane; I've traveled with 'em before. Burn me, I don't believe in any hanky-panky there. That pilot's name is Jean Morel; he's the crack man of the southern line, and pretty near above suspicion. . . ."

"I know that," said Ramsden. "They said they were assigning him to us. But it makes the thing worse. Hayward's right in this: How in Satan's name can anybody force a plane down exactly where he wants it to go? How could Flamande as a passenger hope to do that?"

Then Ramsden showed that side of his nature which explained his popularity in other countries. Suddenly he slapped his hat against his leg and chortled.

"I never heard of anything so dashed sporting in my life!" he crowed. "Sir, we shall be very pleased to accept your hospitality. Let Flamande do his cussedest. There happens to be somebody here who will queer Flamande's pitch quicker than Gasquet ever can. I mean — that 'un." He pointed at H.M. "I don't know how he got here, but he's here, and the Great Flamande had better mind his eye. By the way, let's get these introductions over. That's Sir Henry Merrivale. And . . . ah, the ladies! This is Miss Cheyne. This one," he goggled round at the girl Elsa, "is Miss — Mrs. ——"

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"Middleton," supplied the man beside her and beamed, Elsa beamed back at him. "Mrs. Middleton. My wife."

"And Mr. Middleton," continued Ramsden. He hauled the stout man forward. "This is Mr. Ernest Hayward. He was in Washington when I was there, over twenty years ago during the first Wilson administration. And, now that I think of it, I believe Ken was, too." He looked at me. "Finally, this is Mr. Blake, a friend of mine, who looks as though he could do with a wash."

D'Andrieu bowed. "And are there no more passengers of the plane?"

"Three more to come. I believe one of 'em, tall thin chap, introduced himself to me as the Paris Correspondent of the London *Record*. Now, then, sir, if you'll ask our men to bring up some of our luggage. . . . By the way, H.M., where's your car?"

The word luggage recalled me to what had been entirely forgotten. But I saw the realization come to Evelyn's eyes. By this time Drummond and his two avengers must have come up to our bogged cars. What they would be saying to Marcel I could imagine. Also, it was clear that their next move would be to come straight here. The realization sent my heart into my boots. But, before H.M. could speak, I threw the dice.

"M. d'Andrieu," I said, "our cars are down by the landing-stage at the river. But, before you take us in, it's only fair to warn you that we are being pursued by the police."

"Now this is a nice respectable bunch we've got into!" growled Hayward, opening his eyes wide. "What have you been up to, young man?"

"Assaulting policemen. It was entirely an accident, I assure everybody. Sir George himself can vouch for our — respectability. We thought they were hold-up men when they tried to stop our car. So I assaulted the leader."

D'Andrieu examined me with refreshed interest.

"I am acquainted with the irrepressible spirits of the British, Mr. Blake," he assured me, clucking his tongue sympathetically, "and I am entirely at your service. What would you like me to do?"

"From your point of view, it might interfere with the sport to have the police on the premises. Flamande enjoins against it, and you are following his instructions. . . ? So, if they did get here, and you told them you had not seen us ——"

"Auguste!" called our host in a sharp voice, and seemed to reflect. Up stepped the big major-domo with the curling mustache, giving D'Andrieu a military

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salute. The doddering little figure stiffened to parade-ground rigidity. "Please let us have a description of this leader, Mr. Blake."

Without pity or bowels I described Harvey Drummond, an agent of His Majesty's Intelligence Department. I said he was a plain-clothes man accompanied by two policemen.

"You hear, Auguste?" D'Andrieu asked sharply. "If this fellow comes here and attempts to make unpleasantness, you know nothing. If he persists, it will probably be best to throw him into the river."

"*Oui, mon colonel,*" said Auguste happily.

"Then, my friends, if you will come to the fire in the library . . ."

A sharp rat-tat-tat sounded on the big knocker of the front door. We all whirled round. Auguste straightened his shoulders, composed himself, and went to answer it. Inside stalked the prim, straight-backed Frenchman whom I had judged to be a professional man of some sort. He had a sharp, clean-shaven face, with a heavy jaw and small eyeglasses through which he regarded us sharply from under the brim of his black slouch hat. Under one arm he pressed a brief-case, and was tapping it impatiently with his other hand. Addressing Ramsden, he spoke in the slurred clipped speech of the Midi.

"I bring information. Insufferable information. This, monsieur, is an outrage. I am assured by the pilot that our aëroplane is damaged beyond repair, and that we shall be unable to proceed tonight."

CHAPTER SIX

IMPERTURBABLE during a babble of talk, our host led us out into the hall again through a door on the left, and into a big room where the blaze of a huge log fire was grateful. But, in contrast to D'Andrieu's fastidious presence, it was blackened and ill-kempt in the damp of the place as though it had been shut up for years.

Auguste took our sodden wraps; all but those of the latest comer in the eyeglasses, who remained stiff and black-clad by the fire.

"I thank monsieur for his courtesy in admitting us," he said to our host, "but the situation is truly impossible. The pilot says that we cannot move until tomorrow ——"

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D'Andrieu's eye twinkled. "Surely that is not too bad? And I shall be very much insulted if you refuse to spend the night under my roof."

"Again I thank monsieur for his courtesy. But that is quite impossible. It is imperative that I be in Paris early to-morrow morning. Allow me: I Am Dr. Hébert, the police-surgeon for the Department of Bouche du Rhône, at Marseilles. I go to Paris on official business, and delay would be inconvenient. But certainly it is not necessary to spend the night? You have a telephone?"

"Unfortunately, no. It would be impossible to stretch the wires so far across ——"

"But you have electric light."

"True, M. le Docteur. The current is supplied by my own dynamo in the cellar."

"But surely you have an automobile?"

"No. I am a hermit, you see. Twice a week provisions are brought to me from Orléans in a cart. On the rare occasions when I go out, I ride horseback." He reflected. "At my stable just over on the — mainland, I have some good saddle-horses."

"I do not ride," said Hébert violently.

Middleton said soothingly, "Doctor, we have the perfect host — the perfect quarters — everything. Why kick? Besides, I want to see what happens. Eh, Elsa?"

Even Hayward nodded agreement. Hayward, who had piled himself in a chair with his knees wide apart, looked thoroughly comfortable. Except for his glasses and his short pompadour of silver hair, Mr. Hayward looked exactly like a butler in a drawing-room comedy. The persuasiveness of his pleasant voice filled the room.

"What I say is this," he declared. "I no more expect to meet this crook than I expect to meet — a unicorn, for instance." He looked curiously at Ramsden, who remained stolid with his jaws shut, and then he went on: "But, as Mr. Middleton says, why kick? We have an admirable host, cheerful company, and so why, Dr. Hébert, are you so anxious to go?"

"I might inquire," said Hébert, becoming polite, "why you are so anxious to stay. But I let it pass. Do you know that a notorious criminal has threatened to be with us? It was in all the Marseilles newspapers tonight. Well?"

"We know more than that," grunted Ramsden. "Let him see the letter, M. D'Andrieu."

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The doctor read it, and his face went sallow.

"Well, well?" he cried, shaking the letter in an agony of impatience. "And you have not done anything, any of you? Are you mad? Have you not called the police?"

Hayward shifted. "Contrariwise, Doctor: if any police show up, the butler has instructions to fire 'em out on the seat of the pants. Is everybody happy?"

Young Middleton, who was teetering forward and backward on his heels, murmuring asides in German to a still-bewildered Elsa, appeared to be enjoying himself almost as much as D'Andrieu. He pointed.

"Just to start the ball rolling," he volunteered, "I'll make a guess. For a starter I'll say that Mr. Hayward is Gasquet."

Hayward chuckled, evidently rather flattered. "Well, I might be, at that," he agreed comfortably.

"Don't you see what we've got here? We're playing not only the usual game of 'Find the criminal,' " said Middleton, excitedly tapping his finger into his palm, "but also the game of 'Find the Detective.' Well, who is the detective? Take Mr. Hayward, for instance. He couldn't possibly be Flamande because he would be too easy. People would be suspicious of a character of his type right away as the criminal. I'll show you what I mean! It's easy enough to make a clergyman the murderer; so obvious that it occurs to everybody. The thing to do is not to make him the murderer, but the detective. You follow that?"

"Owen, I vill not haf you against the Church speaking!" said the lovely Elsa. "It iss not nice. If we stay here I should like a bath, pliz, somebody, yes?"

She had seen two footmen, under the direction of Auguste, bringing luggage into the hall. Then she and Evelyn went off to change. It was just as well they did, for Hébert spoke then. He had been warming his thin hands at the fire, holding himself in. Now he spun round.

"You think, I suppose," he said quietly — so quietly that we all turned to look at him — "this is a joke. I can laugh as well as anybody. But not at this. Flamande is really a murderer. It is the reason why I go to Paris. He murdered a man last night in Marseilles."

"And why," said D'Andrieu quietly, "should you go to Paris because a man was murdered in Marseilles?"

"Because of the way that this murder was done. I do not see how the hole in that person's head could have been made by any living man. Messieurs, I am

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not fantastic. But I tell you that it could have been made, so far as I know, only by the long, sharp horn of an animal."

"At last we come to the unicorn," murmured D'Andrieu, with relish. "That is the part which puzzled me most. I do not, of course, ask the obvious question as to what the unicorn is ——"

"No," said Ramsden. "Let Flamande find that out for himself."

"We have interrupted you, Dr. Hébert," said D'Andrieu. "Shall we go back to the man who was murdered in Marseilles? I am interested in that. I am especially interested in it because of a legend that to be gored through the head by a unicorn is always the fate of a traitor."

I looked slowly round the group. Hayward took the cigar out of his mouth and sat up. Middleton seemed possessed of a dubious excitement, as though he wished he could believe all this but rather thought it was a joke. Hébert scowled, with the gesture of one clearing away nonsense. Our host smiled. And, occupying an Empire sofa, old H.M. — who had not spoken a word since we entered the room — remained as impassive as a poker-playing Buddha.

"You'd better take charge, Merrivale," said Ramsden abruptly. "This fellow knows too bloody much."

"Uh-huh. Y'know, son, I was beginnin' to think it was about time I did." Dully H.M. contemplated Hébert, shifted, and pointed at him with his pipe-stem. "All the time I been listening like a mouse, it's struck me you've come to a very rummy Q.E.D., Doc. 'Flamande is a murderer,' you say. 'Why?' we say. 'Because,' you say, 'here's a man dead of a wound that couldn't have been made by a living man, but only the horn of an animal.' Why tack it on Flamande, then?"

"It is not a particular secret, no. It was published in the newspapers. You perhaps read it? I ask you that because" — the doctor folded his arms — "it might be of interest. The dead man was an Englishman."

And now the name in that newspaper paragraph flashed back to me. 'M. Gilbert Drummond, a solicitor, of London. M. Drummond's brother has been informed of the sad affair.' Drummond. Brother. Brother Harvey?

"His name, H.M.," I interposed, "was Gilbert Drummond. Would he be any relation to ——?"

"Only his brother, that's all," said H.M. after a pause.

"You know M. Gilbert Drummond, then?" interposed Hébert, with gruff

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overacting of politeness. "One moment, sir! I think we go too fast, yes? Don't you think it odd that a man who admittedly knew M. Drummond should appear so — so fortuitously out of the dark when our aëroplane comes down?"

"You think I'm Flamande?" inquired H.M. comfortably. "Well, I got no objection. But why do you say Flamande must have committed that murder, when you also say only an animal could have done it?"

Hébert folded his arms. "Because there was one detail, my friend, not given to the press. The victim spoke three words in French just before he died in the ambulance. They asked him who had attacked him, and he answered in the distinct hearing of two people, 'It was Flamande.' They then said, 'Do you mean Flamande the criminal?' Well, he gave a violent nod and" — Hébert gestured — "did not awake again. It was a miracle he lived one minute.

"I examined him. A bullet-hole? No!" declared Hébert, gruffly warming up. "No, no, no, no! I know the bullet-holes. First, the orifice was much bigger than the largest caliber of firearm. So big that any such penetration would have removed —" He touched the back of his head and made an expanding motion. "Second, I found no bullet in the wound. Third, I found evidence (yes, I will spare you unpleasant details) that, after it has penetrated, something has been *pulled out* of the wound. Well? Some clean spike has been driven in to penetrate exactly six inches. Dr. Melisse is inspired. Because there is the establishment of a butcher at the other side of the park, he says, 'Might it have been done with a pole-ax?' "

"A pole-ax?" Ramsden repeated. "Look here, man, d'you mean one of those medieval things?"

"I think Sir George means a battle-ax," said D'Andrieu thoughtfully. "It is almost the same thing. We have the head of the ax as the cutting weapon, but on the opposite side there was, I believe, an iron spike which could be used to advantage for close fighting. But can you picture Flamande walking about in search of victims with a battle-ax over his shoulder? It is worse than impractical. It approaches the comic."

"It was not comic," said Hébert quietly. "It was horrible."

The silence stretched unendurably. . . .

"I only know, then, as I was about to say," the doctor went on, "that it was nothing of the sort. The wound was much too large, it was far too deep, and a weight sufficient to drive it in would also have split the skull. This wound was clean. Further ——"

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"Now, now," rumbled H.M. soothingly, "We can take it as established, then, hat all this funny business was not done with any form of ax or the like?"

A voice from the doorway said:

"We can, Sir Henry. I saw the body myself."

H.M. jumped and swore. He roared querulously while the newcomer advanced towards the fireplace, and the newcomer I recognized as the tall thin man who had remained behind with the plane. His shoulders were a little stooped, which gave him the air of peering up at you despite his height. He had wiry black hair, parted in the middle; a long face with a hooked nose, and very intelligent dark eyes under black brows meeting in the middle. His accent was very broad Cambridge when he said:

"Sorry to jump in like this, sir. The fact is I've been lurking outside that door for some time, and I've heard a bit of what you were saying. You see, I wondered what brought the great H.M. down here. You see, I know you by sight even if you don't know me." He turned just as respectfully to D'Andrieu. "I've been talking to Auguste, M. le Comte, and he's told me everything. Devilish good of you to take us in — and what a reward for a newspaperman! Flamande! My name is Fowler, sir; Kirby Fowler. I represent the *Record* in France."

"You are welcome, Mr. Fowler," said D'Andrieu. "We have just been enjoying the game of attempting to discover Flamande. Or Gasquet. Er — do you happen to be either?"

"I don't see any use in goin' on with it at all," grumbled H.M., "unless we know where we stand and how many villains we got to pick and choose from. Is this the lot?"

"There's just one more," Fowler answered. "He's coming now, with the pilot. One more passenger, that is. Ah, here he is now! Come in, Mr. —— Mr. ——?"

I heard footsteps in the doorway, but I was studying Fowler and did not look round. Then a rather familiar voice spoke.

"Drummond," it said. "Harvey Drummond."

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CHAPTER SEVEN

THERE HE WAS in the doorway, nemesis and checkmate. There was the surly eye, swiveling round to peer at each of us; the broad figure, the neck thrust forward, the brown toothbrush mustache slightly lifted. His bowler hat was under one arm, and his hands were jammed into the pockets of his waterproof as he stared round.

"Well, we seem to have picked a decent shakedown, anyway," he said. "Who's to thank for it?"

It was not only these words which turned my brain topsy-turvy. But he had glanced at me, and looked away incuriously — with a blank gaze of non-recognition.

Moreover, although a good deal is required to disturb H.M.'s poker-face, H.M. shut his eyes briefly before he spoke.

"Drummond," he said heavily, "do you mind tellin' me where *you* came from?"

"Where I came from? What the devil do you mean? I came from the plane down there. Didn't you see me?"

"You mean you traveled from Marseilles in it?"

Drummond stared at him in growing anger. "Certainly I traveled from Marseilles in it. Why not?"

"Look here," I said. "You weren't driving a red Voisin touring-car along the Levai road about an hour or so ago? I — borrowed your fountain-pen, if you remember?"

Drummond contemplated me. His color rose. "Are you trying to tell me I didn't make that trip? Good God! Ask anybody here, if it matters!"

"Well, he certainly sat opposite me all the way up," volunteered Hayward. "But what's the debate?"

Suddenly I saw the explanation. Whether or not he was the real Drummond, he was not the same man who had stopped us on that road.

Of this I could be certain now; and, incidentally, I was right. The man before us now was a copy: a good copy, but still a copy. Nor was the difference merely in small physical points — a leaner face, a lesser jowl, a higher skull under the thin brown hair — but the whole make-up had a subtler wrongness. The surliness was a thin mask; the rasp and swagger were assumed. Yet, curiously enough, what seemed to gleam through that mask was more dangerous-looking

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than anything that had animated Drummond of the Levai road. It was intellectual power. You felt the man's hidden smile, and it did not make you easy. The question was, which was the real Harvey Drummond?

I said: "Mr. Drummond, will you let me offer you sincere apologies? It was the surprise of the thing, that's all. I met back on the road a man who looked so exactly like you that ——"

Drummond was staring at me curiously. His eyes seemed to weigh something.

"That's all right," he said, and made a curt gesture. "We'll forget it. Still, I'd like to have a bit of a talk with you this evening. . . . You say somebody back there pretended to be me?"

"No, not exactly. He didn't give his name ——"

"Where is he now?" the other asked sharply; just a little too sharply.

D'Andrieu intervened. "You have no objection to meeting this other man, Mr. Drummond?"

"Certainly not."

Our host's tone was still silky. "And, of course, you are prepared to prove your own identity, if it becomes necessary?"

"Of course. Hang it all, let's forget this mistake, shall we? Then ——"

"Then," supplied our host, "I really think you had better do so. Understand me: I do not judge, at the moment, between the stories of Mr. Blake and Mr. Drummond. They may not even conflict. But I think that they call for some explanation, even if Mr. Blake seems generously ready to acknowledge his mistake."

"Well, I can tell you that *something's* damned funny!" roared Sir George Ramsden. "I don't know that chap by sight," he nodded at Drummond with a kind of doggedness, "but I've heard about him. But turn it round. I know Ken Blake. There's something fishy somewhere, but what is it? What's all this foolery about policemen and fountain-pens?"

"You're certainly right," nodded Hayward, and thrust out his jaw. "You think you know these people, but suppose one of 'em is an impostor? If we're monkeying around with this Flamande ——"

"*Justement*," said D'Andrieu. He turned to me. "Let us begin, therefore, at the obvious beginning. Of course you have a passport, Mr. Blake?"

"Not," I said, "at the moment. A policeman stole it from me."

"Ah! And that," suggested D'Andrieu, with an air of inspiration, "was why you assaulted him?"

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"No. That happened in Paris this evening. It was another policeman."

"Who also tried to rob you?" inquired our host. "You were twice set on by policemen, if I understand correctly. Please do not lose your temper, Mr. Blake. I only seek to comprehend. You then borrowed a fountain-pen from one of these villains, and — may we see the fountain-pen, by the way?"

It was one question I had been uneasily anticipating, and, with my thumbs hooked in the upper pockets of my waistcoat, I had been working loose that gray slip from the pen. It was down in a corner of the pocket now, and I gravely handed out the pen. The slip of paper wound round it had concealed something until now. It had concealed the name "Harvey Drummond" in fine engraving down the side.

"Yours, sir?" asked D'Andrieu, politely handing the pen towards the man who called himself Drummond.

The latter had changed color a little. He took the pen, and turned it over in fingers that were not altogether steady.

"No," he answered gruffly. "It is not mine. I never saw it before."

H.M. blinked round at Drummond. "So, just to put everything in order, I can say I'd like to see your identification papers, son. . . ."

The other put his hand into his pocket. "My own passport —" he said, and H.M. interrupted rather wearily.

"No, no, no, son. I don't mean your 'Harvey Drummond' passport, if you got one; I mean your real identification papers. You're Gasquet, ain't you?"

He spoke so easily that for a second most of us did not realize what he said, or thought it was a slip of the tongue. Then the implication came like a blow in the face. Hayward got up with an oath and twisted round to look.

"I know, I know. I apologize for bein' premature," pursued H.M., sniffing again as he examined his fingers, "and I'm afraid I broke up your own dramatic revelation. But, dammit, man, don't you see I had to? This accident of our bumpin' into Drummond on the road, and on top of it Ken's givin' you the most remarkable imitation of a loony ever seen on any stage, has got things so snarled up that we'll only keep rushin' around in a blind maze if we let things stand. Honestly, I think you better own up. It'll be the easiest means of doin' what you want to do; don't you think so yourself?"

For a moment "Drummond" stood motionless. His head was lowered and we did not see his face. When he looked up, there was no alteration in the face except one of intelligence. Nor was there any alteration in the voice except a

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deepening and mocking note. But it changed the whole man completely.

"I congratulate you," he said, and several people jumped at that tone. He struck a match. "I also damn your penetration. No, my effect is not ruined. All I hoped to do was get aboard the plane without being suspected. As you say, I should have had to reveal myself ——"

Ramsden recovered his senses with a kind of smothered yowl. The other interrupted his questions.

"Yes, I am Gasquet," he said. "If Drummond had followed my orders, and kept out of sight in Paris while I took his place, I think the whole thing would have been accomplished without M. Flamande knowing who I was until the end. As it is it does not matter. He knows me. But then I know him."

Somebody whistled. Fowler came forward eagerly. "You mean that you've spotted Flamande, and that he's here after all? My God, sir, who is it? Do you know what this means?"

"Know what it means?" repeated the other savagely. "It means that a damned murdering mountebank has made a fool of Gasquet for the last time. It means triumph. It means the chase is nearly over. I can tell you a little. Shall we say when we have washed and made ourselves comfortable, and I have procured certain papers from my bag?"

"But Flamande!" —— cried Fowler, and the other turned on him.

"Flamande, my friend," he said, "shall stew in his own juice for a time. He will wait my pleasure. And this time he will not get away. My men will be here presently. We shall have a prisoner for them to take back to Paris; but in good time."

"There is just one little thing, M. Gasquet," said D'Andrieu, frowning, "which remains beside that. . . ."

"Yes?"

"Your credentials. We may be unduly curious, but if you could offer some proof. . . ?"

"Aha, my credentials! Certainly. But at the moment I have no intention of satisfying everybody's curiosity: only that of the two gentlemen most concerned." He looked at Ramsden and H.M., and smiled grimly. "I have something to tell them. I will satisfy them of my identity, and I will do more. If you, gentlemen, will meet me in this room in fifteen minutes, I will confide in you the name M. Flamande is using tonight."

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CHAPTER EIGHT

IT WAS NOT, I reflected as I changed into dry clothes in the room which had been assigned me, a time for sane thought. My watch showed that it was twenty-five minutes past twelve, and the fireworks had been going since eight-thirty; I was too confused by them. Further, I was hungry and D'Andrieu seemed in no hurry to produce that meal. He had conducted proceedings with a solemnity, and an outlandish formality, as unruffled as a formal reception at an English country house.

For instance, we all had separate rooms, although we could easily have doubled up. This was the more fantastic since (to judge by my own room, anyhow) the rooms were never used ordinarily, but had been swept and tricked out with fresh linen as a gesture to Flamande. I remembered our host's doddering upstairs to install us.

The Château de l'Ile was plain of design, except for the carving of the upper and lower halls, and the staircase. Two of its three floors alone were used. The third floor, formerly used by servants and with a separate stairway, had been locked up; and the doors to the towers also were locked. A broad gallery on the second floor where we were housed, similar to the hall below, ran the depth of the château. Each had a side gallery branching off in either direction halfway down, and making four squares of rooms. There were, D'Andrieu explained, no labyrinths, secret rooms, or sliding panels beloved of names splendid in villainy like Guise and Medici.

The staircase was at the rear of the hall, very broad and heavy and gloomy, of oak twisted to gargoyles. Ten steps went up to a landing, where it turned to the left at right-angles and ascended with ten more steps to the floor. On the wall of the landing there was a great tapestry, its red, black, and green colors now faded almost to an indeterminate brown, but with queer flashes of color as you looked at it from odd angles. There were still figures and faces on it, as faint as stenciling. The subject, of which I could make out little, seemed to be a wild-boar hunt or something of the sort. But it gave me an ugly sensation of shock as I went up past it.

Anyhow, I was installed in a room at the front of the gallery on the floor above, overlooking the causeway. It was frowsty with thick greenish hangings; a very smoky fire burnt in a marble fireplace; and a couple of white-globed lamps, innocent of electricity, gave the place a spectral radiance. But I found

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a fairly modern bathroom at the end of the gallery, and afterwards dry clothes changed the whole outlook.

Time now, I supposed, to go downstairs. The house was very quiet, except for the eternal rain and the sullen rushing below. Mingled with it now I thought I heard a dull bumping or banging, for which I could not account.

What the devil *was* that noise? I opened the door and peered out. The gallery was deserted, and so quiet that I thought I could hear somewhere the ticking of a typewriter. The stone gallery, fairly well lighted, had a line of doors on either side running to the intersecting passages, and then on again to the staircase at the far end. That banging noise had not come from here.

I went to the window, twisted the catch, and pushed open the leaves against a howl of rain. Round whirled the curtains; and the bang of the gallery-door in the draft made me jump; but there was enough light from lower windows to see.

The causeway was down at well past the middle. It looked as though there had been wooden piles under the stone; the water was a white vortex upheaving with darkish shapes that banged and drove like a log-jam before they plunged past.

I shut the window, but still stared out. Now that the river had bitten off our only means of communication, we were shut up in a box with Flamande. Gasquet could afford to taste triumph. He had the gentleman separated from shore by only sixty yards of water, but he had him fast.

There was a knock at the door, and I whirled round. It was Evelyn, who had chosen to be resplendent in a white frilled dinner-gown; again golden-skinned and bright-eyed and full of the devil. She put one finger under her chin and very gravely curtsied.

"Meinherr," she said, "belieff me, I vould not haf dress up like a plush horse if it had not been for my friendt Elsa. 'M, yes. She began solemnly to climb into a number guaranteed to make all masculine eyes pop, so I had to do something.

"She has been telling me," pursued Evelyn, "the story of her life. Her English is difficult and her French worse, but I know a little German and got the whole story. She rather likes the idea of staying here. You see, she's horribly afraid of her husband——"

"Afraid of Middleton? Why?

"No, no. Not of Middleton. He's not officially her husband, yet. She's afraid

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of her present official husband (the third), who she thinks is going to come after them mit a saber. They lived at Monte Carlo, where he was dissipating the family fortunes. She ran away from him. She ran to Marseilles, because she thought it was the last place he would think of looking for her. There she met Middleton, who was on his way back from a trip to India. She's only known him a week, by the way. Then they decided to fly to Paris and get her a divorce ——"

"Look here," I said, "this isn't altogether an interest in gossip. What's on your mind?"

"Just that Owen Middleton has been in the picture for only a week, and that he has just returned from India."

"What about India? Good Lord, you don't think Middleton is Flamande, do you? Or that she is?"

Evelyn frowned. "We'll come to India. As to Middleton, I don't know, though I think it's unlikely. And, after seeing her in the nude, I can take my oath *she* isn't. But there's one odd thing I should rather like to know. Why should Elsa screech out and almost faint at the sight of a copy of Balzac's '*Contes Drolatiques*'?"

I led Evelyn gently over to the fire, pushed her into a chair, lit a cigarette for her, and asked questions with some asperity.

"No, I'm not joking," she told me, glowering at a picture over the fireplace, "and I'm not being silly. It was like this. I was sitting in their room, talking to her, when Middleton came up with the rest of you — about fifteen minutes ago. . . ."

"Did he tell you what happened downstairs?"

He hadn't; I could see that by Evelyn's face. Her eyes widened as I gave a brief account, with a kind of incredulous laughter.

"You'll agree now," she said, "won't you, that I was right about one thing? I said Flamande murdered that poor fellow in Marseilles, and this doctor confirms it. Also — it's a very odd thing; you say our suave host caused a sensation by announcing that to be gored through the head by a unicorn was always the fate of a traitor? Yes. Well, I believe I can supply another link."

"Steady, now, and keep cool. Get your evidence in order. What was this you were telling me about Elsa's fainting at the sight of a book by Balzac?"

"Not quite so bad as that. It was like this. Middleton came in very cheerfully, said how-de-do to us, picked up soap and a towel from Elsa's luggage,

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and went out scouting for the bathroom. I got up to go. Meanwhile, Elsa had been prowling about the room, and picked up a copy of Balzac's, '*Contes Drolatiques.*' She was glancing through it at the illustrations, which were of rather a warm variety. Then all of a sudden she let out a skelloch that scared me half to death. Brr! Down went the book on the floor, and she sat down on the bed as pale as that mantelpiece. I picked up the book, but there was absolutely nothing wrong with it; nothing hidden or written or anything like that. I couldn't imagine she'd got that fright from the illustrations. But she took the book out of my hands, and said she had to be alone."

Outside in the gallery, somebody screamed.

The door of my room was not quite closed, and we heard it distinctly. We heard also a crash as of some heavy body pitched forward; a rolling and bumping noise which hesitated, stopped, thudded again, and rolled to end in a heavy jar. Then silence.

I threw open the door and ran towards the direction of that noise — to the staircase at the opposite end. The gallery, I should judge, was about seventy feet long. Doors were being opened in a confusion of people whose movements I did not follow. If anybody had been sensible at that wild moment, we might have snared Flamande then. But the gallery was now dark. Light came into it from only two doorways ahead, and a dull glow from the hall below.

There was a broad stone arch over the opening into the stair well. Here the wide steps descended to a landing, and then turned at right-angles to go down into the hall. The staircase was dusky, since the carven banisters writhed so closely together that only a chink or two of light penetrated from the dull glow in the lower hall. At the top of the stairs stood Elsa Middleton, her head down, holding with both hands to the newel-post. Fowler stood a little way back, staring down.

But what you saw immediately was at the foot of the whole staircase in the lower hall. A man in a dark suit had gone forward on his face, and lay as spilled and shapeless as a laundry-bag. That man was the lately revealed Gasquet. Over him bent H.M. and Dr. Hébert, and I saw Ramsden come running from the front of the lower hall. H.M.'s powerful hands twisted up the head of the fallen man, and let it fall again.

Dr. Hébert looked up. In the silence his thin, shrill syllables rose with terrible distinctness.

"Another hole in the head," he said, "between the eyes."

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CHAPTER NINE

AS I PLUNGED down the stairs, I saw behind me the faces of Fowler, Hayward, D'Andrieu, and the big major-domo Auguste. I heard them all clattering down behind me, so that Hayward cannoned into my arm and we both nearly went headlong over the body at the foot of the last flight.

They had turned him over on his face now, and he was dead. The wound, which was a little above the point between the eyes, was a clean round hole in the skull; but it turned me sick at the stomach, because the weapon had been drawn out of it and had left traces. And the expression of the face? Horror, I think, but above all a blasting surprise.

Hébert was kneeling with H.M. beside the body. Fowler was hunched forward from his long shoulders, pale but fascinated. Middleton stood holding to the lower newel-post. Hayward leaned back against the wall, wheezing and making gestures like a querulous invalid. Auguste stood motionless. And, half way up the stairs, a motionless D'Andrieu stood tapping his fingers softly on the banister-rail.

D'Andrieu broke the hypnosis in a curious way.

"So I was wrong, then," he said. His footsteps were loud on the oak steps as he came softly down. "I thought he was Flamande pretending to be Gasquet."

H.M.'s big voice seemed to reach out and quiet incipient panic. It held us there.

"Stow that! Take it easy, boys; you hear me? We've had enough thinkin' in this business, and he's flummoxed us. We're goin' to act quickly, and you're all goin' to help. — I saw him hit the floor down here. Quick, now, before you've had time to forget: who saw what happened up there? I don't want to know who *didn't* see it! Don't anybody speak except whoever was there and saw."

"I saw it," Fowler answered. The man was badly rattled, and his voice husky. "That is, I was there. I think Mrs. Middleton was, too. But I can't swear exactly what happened. Just — just give me half a tick to get myself straight, will you?"

He looked down furtively at the body, looked away, and turned back with an effort.

"It was like this. His room is up there nearly opposite the head of the stairs.

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My own room is diagonally across from his, on the other side of the hall towards the rear. I was standing in my door waiting for him to come out of his room ——"

"Why?" H.M.'s usual sleepy and half-disinterested growl had gone.

"To — well, to ask him questions for publication when he came downstairs to talk to you and Sir George."

"Uh-huh. How long had you been waitin' there?"

"Well . . . with the exception of a couple of minutes, ever since everybody went upstairs to their rooms about fifteen minutes ago. Everybody, that is, except you and Sir George down here. *He*," Fowler nodded down at the body, "he had gone up a few minutes ahead of us, you remember."

"Good!" said H.M. somberly. "So all that time you were watchin' what went on in the gallery? With your door wide open?"

"Lord, no! It was open just an inch or so; enough so that I could look across at his door."

"Uh-huh. Go on."

"About five minutes ago, every light in the hall went out. Not in the rooms — not in mine, anyhow — because they've got only paraffin lamps. But there are electric lights in the hall. . . ."

"Go on," said H.M., blinking at Fowler. "What did you do when the lights went out?"

"Naturally, I opened the door and looked out. I couldn't see anything except a kind of glow from down here in the lower hall; you could see it over the well of the staircase. Just then I heard a bolt being drawn and a door open straight across the gallery from me. I knew that was the bathroom door, though I couldn't see much. But I heard Middleton's voice from the bathroom say, 'What's the matter? Somebody blown out the fuses?' I said to him, 'They seem to be on downstairs.' So he closed the bathroom door and went down towards his own room on the other side of the staircase. I saw him pass the staircase, and open the door of his and Mrs. Middleton's room: there was a lamp in there. And, at just about the same time, this chap — Gasquet — opened *his* door. . . ."

H.M.'s eyes narrowed, and became impassive. "Very interestin'. Now tell us what he did. You get a good view of him, hey?"

"Yes. There was a lamp on the table just beside the door, and he bent down to blow it out. He had in his hand one of those long brownish cardboard envelopes; a sort of miniature filing-case with pockets, if you know what

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I mean. Lawyers use them. He seemed a bit surprised to find the gallery dark. He hung back for a second; then he blew out the lamp and went straight for the stairs. . . ."

"Dammit, don't hesitate! What then, hey?"

"I don't know. It wasn't exactly that my eye was distracted — you see, just then the Middletons' door opened, and Mrs. Middleton came out — because I don't think I should have followed it in any case. He was within a couple of feet of the staircase, and I was just going to sing out to him when the thing happened.

"The best description I can give (it's only conveying a hint, really)," said Fowler, in an agony of literary precision, "is that something or somebody seemed to grab him in the dark. He jerked, left and right, as though it had him. Then he let out that hellish screech just as his hands went up to his own forehead — like this. I don't think he screamed again, but he may have. He pitched straight forward down the stairs.

"I stood there for a second, hearing him hit as he went down. Then I ran up. Somebody was running from the other direction; Mrs. Middleton, I think."

"You ran for the top of the stairs, hey? Well, did any attacker duck past you, back into the gallery?"

"I didn't see anybody, but it was dark and he might have done that."

"Ah! Now," said D'Andrieu, poking out his neck. "Let us suppose this! Let us suppose that, while he stands there, a bullet is in some fashion fired either from the hall below or from the other end of the gallery where he is standing. Wouldn't that produce exactly the result we have seen in every respect?"

"That's *sense*," said Hayward.

Dr. Hébert got up. He gave a curious impression of seeming to hop while he dusted his knees. And he refused to speak English.

"Bullets!" he cried. "Ah, zut! Look at that, and still you talk of bullets! I ask you, M. le Comte, if you have ever seen a bullet-wound like that? It would have taken out the back of his head. Also, there are signs of a weapon withdrawn. What caused it?"

"That's what we're goin' to find out," said H.M. woodenly. "It's time to begin movin' the troops. Is there somewhere we can put this poor feller decently while the Doc makes an examination? Back-library? Good! Auguste, you pick him up and carry him there. And take him easy, son," nodded H.M.,

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in a curious vacant voice, "I'm beginnin' to think he's a better man than we ever suspected. I don't mean a detective; I mean a man. Then you come back here, Auguste. Doc, look him over — I'll have a go at it presently. You might see whether he's got in his pockets anywhere that miniature letter-file our friend Fowler was talking about, but I'll lay you a fiver to a cold kipper it's vanished."

He stood back while Auguste gravely and without difficulty hoisted up that heavy sack. When Auguste's footfalls had died away among the pillars, H.M. fished out his pipe from a baggy coat pocket.

"H'm. We'll have a bit of a reconstruction, hey?" he continued, wheezing. "But there's something to be determined first. How many people are in the house at this minute? What about those three airmen, by the way?"

D'Andrieu frowned. "That, my friend," he said, "is something I genuinely regret. They are not here, and now they are not likely to be here. The water has washed out our causeway, they were cut off —" He made an expressive gesture, and turned quickly. "You had not heard of that, gentlemen?"

Evidently Hayward, Fowler, and Middleton had not heard that the causeway was down. They said so with some violence.

"Nor I, I regret to say, until a moment ago," said D'Andrieu smoothly. "Auguste had just come up to tell me when this very unpleasant business occurred. Gentlemen, I am desolated, but I am sure we can make you quite comfortable until the difficulty is adjusted tomorrow morning. Er—where was I? Yes. As to the others in this house, there are my servants. There is Auguste, and Jean Baptiste, the cook. Joseph and Louis are tonight masquerading as footmen, although they are respectively my groom and (what is the word?) handy-man. That is all."

"Excuse me, monsieur," interposed Auguste, who was returning. "There is one other now. There is a taxi-driver who calls himself Marcel Célestin. He is very drunk."

H.M. looked us over.

"I want everybody here to go and stand exactly where he was when he heard the poor feller yell. Take down here first. Ramsden, Hébert, and I were here. I was standin' in just about the same place I am now. Where were you, Ramsden, before you came runnin' up?"

"Outside the front door. I was trying," growled Ramsden, "to see how

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much of the causeway was down. H'm! You were starting upstairs to find out why friend Gasquet hadn't come down to meet us yet. . . . What about Hébert, by the way?"

H.M. blinked. His face wore an expression of ghoulish mirth.

"Hébert and I — uh-huh, we're all right. We can corroborate each other. He was down here too, comin' towards the stairs, and we were in each other's sight. Lucky, hey? Now, then, let's go upstairs and settle positions there. Stand back, all of you, and keep an eye out for that cardboard file. Humph." He stumped up the stairs, peering curiously at the banisters and making obscure noises in his throat. On the landing he stopped and looked at the tapestry. Swinging it to one side, he revealed a window in a deep embrasure.

"So-ho. This gets still more interestin'. This window's unlocked." He twisted and untwisted the catch, and then peered round at D'Andrieu. "Do you usually keep it unlocked?"

"To my knowledge, it is never left open."

"Uh-huh. What's outside? Straight drop to the river?"

"No. There is," said D'Andrieu, and tapped his nose, "a flat roof with a balcony railing. You can step out in it, if you do not mind getting wet."

"If you got out on there from here, is there any way back into the house without usin' this window again?"

"There is," replied D'Andrieu slowly. His eyes narrowed. "There is on either side a low buttress, leading up past a bedroom window on either side. They are the rooms now occupied by Mr. Hayward and Mr. Fowler. Any agile person could easily climb to either window. Shall we . . . ?"

"Now, now, take it easy! Upstairs, and show me where you were standing. It's pretty dark up here, and that's a fact. I suppose a fuse was blown? Ken, you've got that flashlight you borrowed from the taxi-driver; hop down to your room and get it."

I groped my way down, fumbled, found the right door and took the flashlight from the table. Of course the thing would not work, and my fingers were too clumsy to repair it. But, when I hurried down the gallery, a reassuring call came from D'Andrieu. He and H.M. were inside a door opposite the head of the stairs — a linen closet — and D'Andrieu spoke as I groped inside.

"This is the central point for the upstairs lights. Ah! There is nothing wrong with the fuses. The switch was merely thrown out of ——"

"*Stand still, everybody!*" roared H.M. "Somebody just dropped something.

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Something white. I saw it go down. Stand where you are! Lights, now!"

The gallery sprang into light. We all crowded back, because we caught a glimpse of what lay on the dark-carpeted floor not far from the door of the linen closet. On the white oblong of the envelope were typed the words, "For M. le Comte D'Andrieu."

CHAPTER TEN

D'ANDRIEU PICKED IT UP, opened it and spoke very quietly: "It is from Flamande. And his tone seems to have changed. He does not make jokes now."

It was the first time I had seen D'Andrieu with a serious face. He looked hesitant, as though he were weighing something.

"Shall I read it to you, gentlemen? It is in English this time. If he is telling the truth, he has altered matters considerably.

" 'MONSIEUR:

" 'I write this because I must. A misunderstanding must be cleared up now. For this purpose I have borrowed someone's portable typewriter, which I found in the general luggage; the typewriter may be found now in the linen closet.

" 'By the time you receive this, I shall have dealt with a fool who got in my way. I do not believe in murder unless it is absolutely necessary. This was necessary. The fool would have made trouble for me unless I removed him. . . .' "

Now I remembered the ticking of the typewriter I had heard in the quiet gallery some minutes before the murder. H.M. peered round.

"Who's got a portable typewriter, by the way?" he asked.

"I have," replied Fowler. "I didn't notice whether it was among the rest of the stuff they put in my room. In the linen closet?" He strode over, glanced inside, and from under a shelf drew out a worn Remington and snapped open the clasps of the case. He added grimly: "This is it, right enough. He's even used the stationery I had stuck in the top of the case."

"Now attend, gentlemen!" said our host.

" 'Now as to the important thing, which I warn you is more serious

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than any other. Yesterday you received a letter which purported to come from Flamande. I never wrote that letter. It is a plain forgery. There is among you someone who in his newspaper capacity must often have seen my signature on letters. Let him study the signature and tell you whether it is genuine.

" 'But I have a suspicion who did write it. My great satisfaction is that I can at this moment stretch out my hand and touch any of you, but you do not know me. I have a score to settle before I take the unicorn from Sir George Ramsden. That should be sufficient warning to him from

FLAMANDE.' "

"Wow!" said Middleton, and looked round rather uneasily. "Why should anybody fake a letter from a criminal? By the way, is he right about that signature?"

D'Andrieu looked inquiringly at Fowler, who frowned.

"You've got me," the latter admitted. "I thought — that is, I wasn't just sure, but there seemed to be something rather fishy about that other letter. May I see both of them?" He took the two letters and studied them. His expression of bewilderment grew. "And yet I could have sworn these signatures were pretty much alike! I still don't know. If the first one is a forgery, then it's jolly good."

He paused as Elsa and Evelyn came out of the former's room and walked slowly towards our group. Elsa's small, plump face was very pale, so that the make-up stood out vividly, but she was composed. Like Evelyn, she wore white: a low-cut gown gleaming with sequins. Her hands fluttered a little as she hesitated, and then appealed to D'Andrieu.

"Please," she said, "I am sorry I haf go bong like that. I am upset. I — I — what iss your name, please? I do not know the French names ——"

H.M. interposed, addressing her in German, and she turned to him eagerly. My own knowledge of this language is confined to *Schloss*, *Ausgang*, and *Bahnhof*, words which no traveler in Germany can conveniently avoid learning; and I think most of us would not have followed the rattle of syllables if Evelyn and Middleton had not alternately translated like court interpreters. H.M. kept his wooden expression, but for the first time I saw (malevolently) a gleam of excitement behind his glasses.

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She confirmed Fowler's story in its essentials. She had stepped out into the gallery, she said, just after Middleton had returned, on her way downstairs. The lights in the gallery were then out, but she did not know how long they had been out. She was just in time to see Gasquet, in his own doorway, blow out the lamp and go towards the stairs. She had noticed a light shining from Fowler's room; but she had not known this was his room, and did not see him there at that moment.

Then came the crucial points, given now as nearly as I can remember the translations.

H.M.: How well could you see him when he was near the head of the stairs?

ELSA: Not well, but enough to know who he was. There was a little light from downstairs. Yes, I could see him.

H.M.: Did you see anybody attack him?

ELSA: No; nobody came near him.

H.M.: What did happen?

ELSA: I do not know. It was as though he had run into something, like a man walking against a wall. He put his hands up to his head, and then he began to scream. Then I did not see what happened, because he fell straight down the stairs. I think he screamed again, but I am not sure. It upset me very much.

H.M.: Which direction was he looking just before it happened?

ELSA: Straight down the stairs.

H.M.: So that if any shot had been fired, it had to come from that tapestry facing him down on the landing?

ELSA: How do I know? I did not notice things like that. I hate things like bullets.

H.M.: Could you see the tapestry from where you were standing?

ELSA: I think I could see the upper half of it, that is all. The banisters hid the lower part and the stairs.

H.M.: Did you see the tapestry move, as though there were somebody behind it?

ELSA: No, I saw nothing like that.

H.M.: And that is all you know, is it?

ELSA: All!

After this complicating business, H.M. stumped round the top of the stairs, his little eye measuring distances. Nor did he show the perplexity which was

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evident in other faces. Ramsden, after a rather ugly glance between Elsa and Fowler, summed it up.

"One way or the other, Henry my lad," he declared, "this business don't make sense. There was nobody with him; right! Nobody attacked him; right! He was standing there by himself when something cracked him like a bullet. Well, say somebody was standing down behind that tapestry. He fired. After that, he climbed out of the window behind the tapestry on the flat roof. He climbed up and got into the house again either through Fowler's window on one side, or Hayward's on the other. In the dark and the general confusion, he mixed with the rest and came downstairs. Fair enough? But ——"

"Won't do," said Hayward. "It couldn't have been a bullet, for the simple reason that there was no bullet in the wound; now was there? And we could all see for ourselves that something had been pulled *out* of that wound. Finally, there's that doctor. He examined the other man in Marseilles. He says there's no gun of a caliber big enough to have made that hole, without blowing off the fellow's head. He says that's impossible."

D'Andrieu raised one eyebrow.

"I very much fear that he is right. I have had some small experience myself with the high-caliber firearms. . . . *Eh bien*, there remains the question of which of two impossibilities we prefer. Very well. He could not have been shot, because that is impossible. The weapon could not have been used like a dagger or thrown like a spear, since to do this the murderer must have been invisible. That is impossible, too. Personally, I prefer the first alternative."

"But look at it in another way!" exclaimed Middleton, afire with a new idea. "It was dark up here, and there's the victim standing at the top of the stairs. The murderer is behind that tapestry. He comes out, but he's crouched so low down that Elsa — who can see only the upper half of the tapestry — doesn't see him. The murderer has got some heavy steel thing like a dagger. He throws it from there. The victim collapses, and goes down the stairs. Fowler says it was a second or two before he himself ran up and looked down the stairs. As the victim hits the landing, the murderer reaches out, pulls the weapon loose, takes that cardboard letter-file from the fellow's pocket, and ducks back behind the tapestry just as Fowler looks down. What about that?"

Fowler was staring at Middleton. "Now, look here, old man," he said with deprecating benevolence. "First, there's nobody alive who could throw a dagger of that kind hard enough to go six inches into a man's skull. Second

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point, I should have seen anything that was thrown. Third point, do you realize that when I looked down the stairs Gasquet was still rolling? In that little space of time, the murderer would have had to pull out the weapon — also a job for a strong man, and a long job — pick his pocket, and go behind the tapestry. And I'll take my oath there was nobody on those stairs. It's absolutely impossible." He turned to H.M., checking himself as though he feared he had spoken too heatedly. "You agree with that, sir?"

"Uh-huh. Oh, yes. I agree with it. The damage was done before then."

"Then suppose you tell us how it was done?" suggested Ramsden, sticking out his neck.

H.M. surveyed us. "Gents," he said, after a draw at his empty pipe, "I want you to take up your places exactly where you were when you heard the poor feller yell. I'll stand here and watch. Ramsden will take Gasquet's place. When you hear him sing out, run out of your rooms and do just what you did then. First we'll reconstruct what happened just before the murder.

"Ramsden, you go in his room, light the lamp, and stand ready to blow it out and walk to the stairs when you get the word. Fowler, you stand inside your door where you were before. Middleton, you're for the bathroom ——"

Middleton cut him off. "There's no objection, so far as I'm concerned," he said, "to going through this business. But Elsa's not going to. Anybody who tries to force her into it, I'm telling you now, is going to get himself into a hell of a lot of trouble."

I tried (and failed) to read the curious expression on H.M.'s face. Then H.M. nodded. "You're quite right, son," he agreed in a dull voice. "I haven't been thinkin' much, have I, of ordinary decency? It can't be a very nice business for the gals. And what I want to see can be acted by a few people, anyway. Look here! Middleton, you and Hayward take the gals downstairs. I say, D'Andrieu, will you lead 'em to the grub? But come up here again, will you? I got somethin' rather important to ask."

"The suggestion is an excellent one," beamed our host, "and I shall return immediately. As a matter of fact, I have something rather important to answer. Remain here, Auguste."

Evelyn raised her eyebrows with an inquiry as to whether she ought to remain. But I shook my head. She joined Elsa, Middleton, Hayward, and D'Andrieu as they went downstairs. H.M. remained motionless at the head of the stairs.

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"Are you likely," said Ramsden, with heavy sarcasm, "to be any more communicative now? What's on your mind?"

"Everything. Uh-huh, everything. Gents, I've known cases in which two or three points seemed to be wrong, but I never yet met one where every single blasted detail was wrong. 'Oh, what a tangled web we weave, When our common sense we can't believe.' And my common sense doth shrink affrighted, if you follow me, from every speech, detail, and gyration that's gone on. We seem at first glance a fairly solid and sane group of people — but, oh, my hat, look at us! I feel like somebody with the D.T.'s seeing 'Peer Gynt' played backwards. Why is it all so wrong?"

"Proving what?" inquired Ramsden, who was watching him shrewdly.

"Oh, provin' nothin'. Only, if we see another bit of lunacy ——" H.M. wheezed. "Open Gasquet's door, son, and light the lamp."

It was Fowler who pushed open the door. Groping to the left, he found a white-globed lamp on a small table, struck a match, and kindled the wick. Like all the others, this room was large and high-ceilinged. Its furniture was white, with a great deal of shabby red plush; but over the fireplace in the left-hand wall hung a fine Napoleonic bivouac scene by Meissonnier, who happens to be my favorite artist. On the right-hand wall was a big red-velvet curtain, and in the wall facing us two tall windows. I was looking at the Meissonnier, so that I did not at first understand the reason for H.M.'s muttered profanity.

"You see anything funny about this?" he was asking the other two. "Look there. Where's his luggage? There's his hat and coat, across the back of that chair. But where's his luggage? Didn't he have any?"

There was a vast throat-clearing behind us. Towering up paternally, Auguste regarded us with amiable respectfulness and twisted the ends of his mustache. He bent forward with solicitude.

"Excuse me, monsieur," he said in French. "Did I understand that you asked about M. Gasquet's baggage?"

"Yes, yes. Absolutely, *mon gars!* Did he have any, eh?"

"Ah, yes. He did have some baggage, monsieur. Two valises, a brown and a black. Yes, he did have baggage ——"

"Well, what's happened to it, then?"

"He threw it out of the window, monsieur," said Auguste agreeably.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

FOR NOT THE FIRST TIME that day I wondered whether I had understood aright; or, if I had, whether this might not be some obscure kind of Gallic metaphor. But by the expression on H.M.'s face I perceived that he had taken the same interpretation. He folded his arms.

"Very, very extraordinary, *mon gars*," he observed, eyeing the major-domo. "He threw his baggage out of the window, did he? And what was the matter with M. Gasquet? Did he go mad, also?"

Auguste reflected heavily, as though he considered this highly probable.

"Yes, monsieur, it did seem an imbecile thing to do, and not practical. But, you understand, he made much difficulty about that baggage ——"

"How?"

"When he first came up here. Downstairs he said to me, 'Where is my baggage? I must have my baggage.' I said, 'It has been put into monsieur's room. If monsieur will follow me, I will show him to his room ——' "

"And when was this? When he left us downstairs?"

"Yes, monsieur. Just as he was quitting the drawing room. Well," Auguste made a gesture, "I brought him up here, where I myself had put the two valises. He looked at them and cried to me, 'My God, that is not all! There is an attaché-case of brown leather, with a lock. Where is it? I saw it downstairs. Find it! It must be found.' I went downstairs and looked. I also questioned Joseph and Louis. They remembered seeing it, but they did not remember where. I went upstairs, and found M. Gasquet just coming out of the room of the American, the tall and stout American with the red face; you know?"

"Hayward?"

"Ah! Exactly," nodded Auguste, with a gusty breath of relief. "I said to M. Gasquet, 'Ah, you were looking for it, monsieur; have you found it?' He looked at me queerly. 'Ah?' he said. 'Er — no, I have not found it.' He looked very angry and a little out of breath. He said, 'Look for it in the other rooms, and, if you find it, bring it to me immediately.' Then he slammed his door. I looked, but it was not there. Then it occurred to me, 'Suppose it had been left behind in the plane when we brought the other baggage in?" So I went downstairs, just as all the other gentlemen were coming up to their rooms. All, that is," he said, with ponderous exactitude, nodding at H.M. and Ramsden, "except you two and the little doctor. Well, I went out to the front door. Then

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I discovered that the causeway had been washed out. I thought, '*Tiens*, I had better tell the colonel of this at once.' I went upstairs again. In passing, I knocked at M. Gasquet's door ——"

"That," Fowler interposed abruptly, "is true. I saw him."

"Thank you, monsieur," said Auguste. "I came in here, and told M. Gasquet what had happened. He was furious. But he said, 'Never mind; I have something in my valise that will do just as well. Get out.' So I went down to the colonel's rooms ——"

"What did he say when you told him that the bridge was broken?"

Auguste opened his eyes wide. "Why, monsieur, he said it was unfortunate, but that we could arrange matters in the morning."

"Continue."

"He gave me directions for a few minutes. He said the supper was to be opened at one o'clock. The colonel was cleaning a rifle in his study at that time. Then I had occasion to go into my own room, which is off his study, and has windows on the same side as this room. I happened to glance out of my window and I could see M. Gasquet leaning out of this window here. He seemed still very angry. I saw him lift up a valise and hurl it out. My window was open, and I distinctly heard him say, 'Stolen?' Then out went another valise, and M. Gasquet slammed the window shut so hard I thought it must be broken. Then I went out through the study, towards the anteroom and the door out into the gallery. M. Gasquet had left his room just after he had thrown his valises out. As I opened my own door, I was just in time to hear him scream and see him fall. . . ."

"You saw it, too?" Fowler asked sharply.

"Ah, but a very little, monsieur!" said Auguste. "so little that I could not swear to anything. An impression! A flash! A scream and a fall; ah, my God, what drama, eh? I turned round." He swung now with a dramatic gesture. "There was the colonel at my elbow. 'The commencement of Grand Guignol, eh, Auguste?' he said."

"Son," H.M. said, "you've reported conversations pretty well tonight, but there's one thing I'm more curious about than anything else. . . . By what you've told us yourself, you've overheard and understood all along when we were speakin' English, didn't you? In fact, you speak English very well, hey?"

"Yes, I speak a little," admitted the other. For the first time he seemed wary. "The colonel has many English friends."

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H.M. regarded him musingly.

"All the time Gasquet talked to us tonight," he went on, "he spoke English. He even spoke English after he'd revealed himself. Now that was natural enough, because it was the predominant language among our crowd, and we'd been holding the court in it. But when he went out and left us, I heard him still speaking to you in English. I'm goin' to venture a guess." He pointed. "I'm goin' to venture that he spoke to you in English all the time. Did he?"

Auguste bowed. At the same time, there was a quick light knock at the door. D'Andrieu doddered in.

"Our friends downstairs are now eating with good appetite, and I trust we shall shortly join them. But first ——"

"Something on your mind?" inquired H.M., with a kind of leer.

"Yes. Flamande's first letter to me, gentlemen, was genuine. I happen to have proof that it was genuine. Then why should Flamande steal Mr. Fowler's typewriter, write a second note denying the genuineness of the first (that is, if he did write the second note), and drop it in the gallery? As I say, I have tolerable proof that the first was authentic."

Ramsden swore. H.M. blinked satirically.

"So you got proof. What proof?"

D'Andrieu seemed annoyed in a mild fashion.

"Yes, yes, yes, reasonable proof. Tonight, when I read you the first letter from Flamande, Mr. Middleton said, 'I should like to see a reply from Gasquet.' And I replied, 'So you shall.'

"When I received that letter from Flamande, I did as I was instructed and forwarded it to Gasquet. I sent the original letter. The one I showed you tonight (need I say?) was a copy I made myself; I wished to produce a dramatic effect. But I was not so foolish as to send a copy to Gasquet: he might not believe me if he did not see the original.

"Now, Gasquet, who of all people should know Flamande's signature, wrote me a reply showing that he did believe it! Yet Flamande now denies that he did write the first letter. Why? The letter I showed you was a typewritten copy on which I had made a tracing of the signature, and Flamande could with truth deny that it was his signature . . . but how could he deny the genuineness of the letter itself? When you think it over, isn't it more reasonable to suppose that the first letter was the genuine one; and that the denial is either some trick or else was not actually written by Flamande?"

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"And yet," said H.M. slowly, "and yet I think you got a deeper purpose in bringing this up now. H'm. Just what's on your mind?"

"I should like to know certain things about Mr. Kirby Fowler, on whose typewriter the note was written, it being carefully pointed out the machine was stolen. But how could that typewriter have been stolen? All the luggage was placed in the rooms beforehand; but Mr. Fowler, by his own statement, was the first of all of us to go upstairs, since he wished to watch M. Gasquet's door. And shortly before the murder, the lights were switched off from inside the linen closet, and the typewriter placed there. Mr. Fowler, by his own testimony, was watching the gallery all the time. You may have noticed that the door of his room is directly across the gallery from the door of the linen closet. He could not conceivably have failed to see anyone who went into the linen closet, carrying the typewriter, to turn off the lights. Well, did anyone go in there? You will notice that he has made no mention of that, although it would immediately have occurred to him. I suggest that at least it calls for some little explanation."

"Indeed?" Fowler said with a sort of polite contempt. "*Vive la logique.* All right. I'll try to be logical as well.

"You say that our luggage, including my typewriter, was put in our rooms. You *say* it was. When we hear about Gasquet's attaché-case, I think we shall do a bit of wondering about *that.* Still, the important thing is that I was watching from the door of my room. I told you I had it open only an inch or so, not to make it too obvious, so that I could look up diagonally towards the door of this room. I was looking to my left while the lights were on. Got that? It means I could see everybody who passed back and forth in that direction, towards my *left.* They were Mr. Blake, who went down to the bath, and came back again some minutes before the lights went out; and Middleton, who went down afterwards and was in the bathroom when the lights went out. Only those two. Got that?

"With the door of my room open only a couple of inches in that diagonal direction, I can't see the door of the linen closet. Make the experiment, if you like. I didn't even know the light-switch was there. But I do know this: Anybody who came from the gallery towards my left, where most of the rooms are located, and went into the linen closet, must have passed across my line of vision. I couldn't have failed to see. But nobody did.

"Are we being logical? Therefore the person must have come from the

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gallery to my right, from the part I couldn't see, and slipped into the linen closet. . . . It's a queer thing, it's a dashed queer thing, you know, but the only rooms located in that gallery on my right are all your rooms, M. d'Andrieu."

Ramsden, who had picked up the two letters on the table and was scrutinizing them, spoke querulously.

"I say, what's the game? Who started this new trouble, anyhow? I don't know what you mean by all this fuss, but so far as I can see these letters," he waved them angrily, "look as though they were signed by the same person."

"That," said D'Andrieu, "is because you know nothing about handwriting. I do."

"But, man, that's not the important thing! If Fowler's right about that linen closet. . . . What do you say, Merrivale?"

"Oh, this?" H.M. was abstracted. "Violent squall in a tea-cup, though there's one very interesting point. Why does our friend D'Andrieu bring it up at all. But you ask me what I'd like to see, and I say I'd like to see that letter from Gasquet."

For the first time there was something like rage in D'Andrieu's face. From his inside pocket he drew an envelope, which he flung on the table.

"Postmarked Marseilles," he said. "And entirely hand-written. Since you seem to disregard all other letters, you may disregard this one also. But perhaps you are acquainted with Gasquet's handwriting?"

"Oddly enough, I am," said H.M. "And this is it."

He drew out a sheet of official notepaper and spread it out on the table. I looked over his shoulder while he read.

"MONSIEUR:

"I thank you very much. I think that in a very brief time we shall put this mountebank where he belongs. If you are really serious about entertaining our company in case he should fulfill his threat (which is possible), perhaps it would be just as well. I shall have him where I want him.

"I cannot tell you how many people will travel by the aeroplane, but I am informed from the advanced bookings that the passengers will be nearly all English or American. So far these include the names of Sir G. Ramsden, MM. Drummond, M. Ernest Hayward, M. Kirby Fowler, and Dr. Edouard Hébert. There will probably be more. I can

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as yet give you no hint as to which of these personalities will conceal Flamande.

"At the moment I am not permitted to divulge any hint concerning the unicorn you mention, except that it is something of great importance to Britain, and that the Home Office at London — with whom I am in communication — are anxiously awaiting it.

"Yours,

GASTON GASQUET."

H.M. looked up. "So he is in communication with the Home Office," he grunted. "Yes. I thought so."

"Just where does it leave us?" said Ramsden.

"Holdin' a big slice of the truth, I think. I know how it was worked now. Flamande made one awful slip and bloomer, and a clew bumped down on my head as big as — as big as a typewriter. We don't need to reconstruct. What I need is grub. Comin', anybody?"

CHAPTER TWELVE

THAT MEAL, I suppose, marked an interlude in the mad business, as though between the two halves of a dance. Unfortunately, there was too much to think about.

Despite his characteristic gesture, H.M. had insisted on reconstructing the murder just the same. And, as we acted out our dumb show, I found that beyond question we were tangled into another of those impossible puzzles with which the cussedness of human events seemed to reward H.M.'s grousing. It was not possible for that man to have been murdered; and yet he was.

H.M. was a realist. When he insisted that the victim in the reconstruction should really fall down the stairs (albeit gently), Ramsden declined the part; and, of course, I was substituted. The purpose of this latter move was to determine whether the crime could have been committed by a murderer on the landing, who first projected some missile and then drew it out (as well as stealing the letter-file) while the victim fell. The complete result of all these experiments was this:

1. It was definitely established that, under exactly the same conditions of light as during the time of the murder, nobody could have approached the

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victim in the gallery without being seen. Fowler stood in his old position while I took Gasquet's part, and Ramsden took the place of Mrs. Middleton. First D'Andrieu, then Auguste, and finally H.M. tried to creep up near him without being seen; each was as big and obvious as an elephant to both Fowler and Ramsden and everybody else. Therefore the victim could not have been struck down by someone standing near him in the gallery.

2. On the other hand, it was also established that he could not have been struck down by a person anywhere else, either close at hand or far away. If the murderer had been anywhere on the stairs, he would have been seen. If he had been concealed behind the tapestry, and had so much as poked his nose out, he would have been seen either by Elsa in the gallery above, or by H.M. and Hébert in the hall below — unless, of course, he had been lying almost flat on his face on the landing. But, even in this unlikely position, the thing was still impossible. He could not have crawled up and struck without being seen. Nor could he have thrown some missile, then drawn it out as the victim tumbled past him, robbed the body of the letter-file, and pushed it on: all in the two or three seconds that elapsed before Fowler had a clear view of the landing.

So we were left with a flat impossibility, which seemed to bother everybody except H.M. H.M. was in a good humor, and in a better after he had something to eat.

It was a lavish business, laid out under the candles in a somber dining room at the rear, and we wandered about helping ourselves.

It was something itself to watch the effect of comfort and warmed innards on the sodden group we had been before. There was still nervousness, but you could face it now. Ramsden opened like a brickdust-tanned flower, and chuckled into people's ears. Elsa and Middleton grew steadily more affectionate. D'Andrieu and Fowler had lost their hostility; they were talking with great amiability, but I thought that for some reason both of them looked very puzzled. Hayward grew almost jovial, and told several stories whose chief feature was the expression on his face while he told them. Hébert alone remained rigid and silent, watching us sharply. He had a private talk with H.M., but his answers seemed to be monosyllabic.

So a mist of tobacco smoke began to rise, and I sat on the ledge in a window-embrasure with a very bright-eyed Evelyn. We clinked glasses.

"Drink up!" I said. "You were telling me you had a theory of some kind about it. What theory?"

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"My theory couldn't happen. It couldn't possibly happen! It couldn't conce ——"

"What couldn't happen?" asked that fool Middleton, and broke into the talk with Elsa. I swore, but Evelyn went on innocently:

"—just at this particular time, anyhow. We were talking about unicorns, in a way." She looked at Elsa. "Feeling better now?"

"I am absolute O.K., donk you," said the latter, who was flushed and smiling. "But Owen hass been talking nonsense. . . ."

"Not a bit of it!" said Middleton, with a kind of confidential violence. "I made a suggestion to Sir Henry Merrivale. Here we are, cut off in this place beyond any kind of communication. Each person claims he's such-and-such — and there's no means of checking up on him, no possibility of routine police work. If anybody's to be tripped up, he's got to be tripped up by straight questioning. The only thing is for us to cross-question each other."

"It would be all right," I admitted, "provided you had enough information to check up on the answers. But suppose you haven't?"

"I think that among ourselves we could. Anyhow, it's the only possible way. . . . Damn it, otherwise we'll all look like a gang of crooks, and our stories won't hang together. That's the way it happens. Take Elsa, for instance! And myself ——"

Elsa looked round in alarm. She said she was not a crook.

"No, now! I don't mean anything like that. I was only thinking of one instance. Believe it or not, I don't even know her husband's name. Suppose they asked me that, and I couldn't answer?" He frowned. "Incidentally, Elsa, what *is* your husband's name; I mean the last one, that you were married to for three months?"

Elsa, on whom the champagne was now having a reverse effect, seemed to have grown terrified.

"You should not think of such things!" she cried. "And enyvay they alvays laugh at me when I pronounce it. It hass the hardest sounds in that language, they tell me. You think it iss needed? I could write it, yes?"

"All right, write it," said Middleton, and handed over a pencil and envelope. "Of course," he appealed to me, "it's not very important, but you see what I'm getting at? It would look like a slip of some kind, and we'd both be in trouble. Then ——"

He broke off. He had given a casual glance at the words she had written, and

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then he stared. Something starkly incredulous glared at that envelope; he looked back at Elsa, who nodded, and then he got slowly to his feet.

"Oh, my God," said Middleton.

"What's the matter?"

"Get your H.M.," he said in a low voice. "We've found an impostor right enough."

Before I could see the envelope we were going quickly but without fuss over to where H.M. and Hébert were talking beside the fireplace.

"I don't want you to think I'm crazy, sir," Middleton said, "but let's find a place where we can talk. I've got the goods on somebody now, and I can prove it."

H.M. followed us out into the hall. We went down to the drawing-room, where Middleton outlined what I already knew.

"Elsa's husband," he went on, "is now at Monte Carlo. It's not possible for there to be a coincidence in names. Somebody has borrowed his name — but someone so unlike him that she never connected the two, and she never knew enough French to catch the right pronunciation of the name when it was given tonight. Once tonight she tried to ask him his name, because she'd got a horrible shock; but he didn't answer. The name she wrote on this envelope," said Middleton, holding it out, "is Raoul Cérannes, Comte d'Andrieu."

"Uh-huh," H.M. said, "I thought so."

"You knew about it, and yet ——?"

"Keep your voice down! Easy, now!" Still with a wooden face, H.M. blew a smoke-ring and watched it curl up. "I knew he was a fake three minutes after we were inside this place. That's what's so wrong with the house; why it has no reality, no personality, d'ye see, no air of being lived in. It's only a shell, maybe I ought to say theater for a whole elaborate, rummy, crazy-fool comedy put on by one man's desire for the spectacular. Only we can't give D'Andrieu away."

"Can't give him away? Why?"

"Because he's the real Gaston Gasquet," said H.M., nodding as he blew another ring. "And it's his show."

"Is it your turn to go crazy?" I asked, after an interval. "Gasquet? You yourself said that the poor devil who was murdered ——"

"Uh-huh. Point is, though, he was no more Gasquet than I am. . . . Ken," he said reflectively, "I've got to ask you to trust me even though I seem bogged

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and sunk in foolishness. I'll ask you to believe that I said to him, 'You're Gasquet, ain't you?' — knowing quite well he wasn't but prayin' he'd have the intelligence to see what I was drivin' at and say he was. He did. He was a clever feller. It was the only chance to preserve what I thought (and now know) he was tryin' to do; so help me, it was! But Flamande . . . well, boys, I don't underrate Flamande now."

"You," I said, "let him get himself killed. . . ."

H.M. whipped up his head. "Let him get himself killed?" he roared. "Yes, yes, I know. It hurts. But I was tryin' to get him what he wanted, and help him along. *Everything* was in order. The case might have been over by now. But Flamande, burn his soul ——!" He knocked his fists against his temples. "The plain truth of the business is that Flamande was too smart for both of us."

"But who the devil was the fellow, if he wasn't Gasquet? And who . . . you say D'Andrieu is really Gasquet?"

"Yes. And this whole business was planned for our benefit. Trace the tangle from the beginning, and you'll see. Start with the time we all arrived at this place, after that very convenient floppin' down of the plane in the next meadow. You and Evelyn Cheyne and I went in with the rest of the crowd. Down comes our bowin' and smilin' host, playing the part of the far-too-good-to-be-true perfect French host, who has had a letter from Flamande and is out to see sport. It didn't ring true. Still, I might have accepted it. But no sooner had D'Andrieu spoken to us, than something gave the show away with an awful bang.

"Think back, now. We all walked in there. We were all muddy, we were all obviously a part of the same party, and the plane was wrecked a good quarter-mile away from this house. In fact, when we started discussin' the accident, I accidentally talked in such a way about the pilot and crew of that plane that it must have been taken for granted that you and Evelyn and I had traveled on it. Yet, with not a word said, D'Andrieu turns round to me and says, 'You and your friends were not aboard the plane, then?'

"Lads, that was an awful slip of the tongue. How in the name of sanity did he know we hadn't been aboard? The answer was, he did know *exactly* who would be aboard that plane — to the last passenger. He knew it beforehand.

"While that was wormin' about in my mind, it presented in itself the only possible explanation of the wrecked plane. What seemed the worst puzzle was really the easiest. Suppose that plane was brought down because the pilot

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had orders to bring it down *from the police*, acting in coöperation with the company he worked for?

"You'd be surprised what a flood o' light that brought in! This pasteboard house, with its queer owner and unused rooms, begins to look very much like an elaborate trap. Elaborate, yes; but it's worth all the trimmings if they can snaffle Flamande.

"Well, how are they goin' to do this? What's the game? We come into the place, and what happens? Just as soon as we're all inside, tricked and timed with beautiful smoothness, down goes the causeway. The thing was timed as carefully as a bomb. And that could've been done only by the coöperation of several people in this château itself. D'Andrieu, Auguste, Joseph, Louis . . . the brains and brawn of the Sûreté, so many eyes to watch for Flamande once they're sure they've got him shut up inside. Think over their every speech and gesture, while we go on to a few more points.

"Flamande has sworn he'll be aboard that plane; Flamande keeps his word. They're not sure what guise he'll take. They're only sure he'll be there, to rob Ramsden of ——"

"What?" I demanded.

"Ask him," suggested H.M., chuckling. He nodded towards the door as it opened, and Ramsden hurried in. "Ask him, while I tell you the rest of a few very, very rummy clews to Gasquet's innocent plot."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"WHAT'S UP?" Ramsden demanded rather querulously. "You all look as though you were guilty. By the way, Merrivale, D'Andrieu is looking for you. He says he's got further proof, and he's very anxious to show you that letter he got was really written by Flamande ——"

"I bet he is," agreed H.M., and turned down the corners of his mouth. "Look here, son, you've got to hear this. Then maybe you'll understand why he wants us to believe that first letter was genuine, even to the extent of framing up a lot of accusations against Fowler. Y'see, if once we got to doubtin' the letter too seriously, it might blow the gaff. Sit down, Ramsden."

Middleton rubbed his forehead perplexedly.

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"If blowing the gaff," he said, "means what I think it does, it strikes me that it's blown. And by you." He grinned. "That is, for all you know, *I* might be Flamande. If I am, you're just tipping me off."

"Uh-huh. Well, son, if you're Flamande," said H.M. imperturbably, "you don't need to be tipped off. You know already, because Flamande does. That's why he wrote that genuine note and dropped it in the gallery upstairs. And it's got Gasquet worried as hell. Flamande knows him, but he hasn't got the groggiest notion where to look for the slippery one. He's gettin' wild — that's partly the reason, too, why he hopped on Fowler. In other words, Gasquet's masquerade has gone bust. Besides, I don't see any real reason why Ramsden should be used as a stalkin'-horse by the French government."

Ramsden stared at him. "I've waited a long time," he said, with tense and sinister calmness, "to hear some sense in this affair. Will you, at long last, condescend to tell ——?"

H.M. did so, silencing the other's protesting yelps.

"I told you D'Andrieu's got the wind up. He showed it in regard to that letter. When we first came in tonight, he presented it as the original letter. Later, when its genuineness was challenged, he made a very thin story of saying he had sent the original on to Gasquet. Then he produced the letter from Gasquet — handwritten, of course, because he wrote it himself," H.M. finished.

Ramsden shook his head. "But wasn't it a damn silly thing to do in the first place? He expected Flamande to turn up, in whatever guise. Flamande appears. He's faced with a forged letter purporting to come from himself. He's made suspicious, and then ——"

"Ho ho ho," said H.M., his face split with a fantastic jollity. "And then what? Is Flamande going to sing out, 'You're a liar; I never wrote that letter,' to D'Andrieu's face? It'll make him suspicious, of course; but will it make him suspicious of D'Andrieu? Did it make *you* suspicious of D'Andrieu? The very straightforwardness of the business would divert suspicion, especially as Flamande will be looking for Gasquet aboard the plane."

"Yet you claim," said Middleton thoughtfully, "that it did make Flamande suspicious, and he knows. . . ."

"Uh-huh. Sure. That's because Flamande is a devilish sight shrewder than Gasquet, in his pleasant but tolerably full-blown conceit, ever thought. I'm givin' it to you as D'Andrieu thought." He pointed. "Now take the advantages of such a forged letter. They're double-barreled. First, Flamande, im-

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mediately after an inexplicable plane-crash, has that inexplicable letter flung in his face. Gasquet reasons that Flamande will need a nerve of steel wire not to get rattled, not to make any slip of speech, not to be put out of countenance or make any betraying sign. You noticed that D'Andrieu insisted on having that letter read aloud, so that he could study faces all at once. You'll notice that the only person to whom he gave the letter to read privately was Hébert, whom he probably knew as a genuine police-surgeon. . . ."

"Which lets Hébert out of it?" asked Ramsden quickly.

"Presumably. Because, d'ye see, Hébert has a first-rate alibi for the time of the murder." H.M. scowled. "Anyhow, you'll see that when Flamande suddenly finds that somehow he must have walked into a trap he'll need all his wits to keep from making *any* slip."

"Which he didn't."

"Which he didn't, curse him! Humph. Second advantage: the effect on Flamande's vanity. Is he going to let this pass? D'Andrieu correctly reasons that he won't. The question is, will his vanity let him take the credit for that first letter and what it threatens? — a strong temptation, d'ye see, because it practically amounts to miracles and conjurin'. Or, on the other hand, will Flamande get mad and repudiate the business? In either case, with his particular twist of mind, it's likely he'll write out some sort of jeer and fling it at us. If he's lured into that, D'Andrieu reasons that he's done for. Every servant in this house is a Sûreté man on the watch. Let Flamande try to slip across any note, and they've got him. It was good reasonin', except that Flamande chose the one moment when everybody was off guard: just after he'd committed an impossible murder.

"I think D'Andrieu took it as almost a certainty that Flamande would write claiming the credit for havin' wrecked the plane. He thought it would be, 'I told you I would do it, didn't I?' And there, my lads, is where he didn't follow Flamande's ugly kink. Flamande poses and he struts; but he wants no music unless he calls the tune. He dropped a note which said, 'I know who put up this game on me. Now, friend Gasquet, look to yourself!' "

"Well, the Chief Inspector of the Sûreté ought to be able to take care of himself," I said. "But let's take the business from the beginning. D'Andrieu (let's call him that, to keep our names straight) has borrowed the name and the château of the real D'Andrieu, who lives at Monte Carlo and never uses this place. . . ."

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"Wait a sec!" cried Middleton, and snapped his fingers. "I'm beginning to get this now! Especially that business about the book and Elsa. She got some sort of terrific scare tonight, and wouldn't tell me what it was. When I came back from the bathroom just before it happened tonight, she was looking at a bedside book — white as a ghost. She shut it and rushed out without saying anything. That was why she didn't wait for me, and was in the gallery in time to see the murder. . . . I looked at the book; it was a Balzac; and the only thing I noticed was D'Andrieu's name written on the flyleaf. . . ."

H.M. seemed in a better temper.

"Uh-huh. Written!" Again he pointed with his cigar. "She'd only been married to the real D'Andrieu for three months, you tell me, and didn't even know he had a place here. Comin' on that name would give her qualms." He blinked as Middleton's face flushed, and the latter glared at him. "Now, now, take it easy! Nobody here has moralist tendencies; and she's a nice-lookin' nymph, burn me but she is!

"But you asked about the beginning of the whole scheme, and you're not yet at the beginning. Let's see if we can puzzle it out. *You* were the beginning, Ramsden. You were to be the stalking-horse."

"Was I?" Ramsden said.

"Oh, we're just sittin' and thinkin', you understand. Let's say you were traveling home through France; let's say the French police and also the Quai d'Orsay were given a quiet request to look after you, because you had something valuable on your person, and you're one of these independent beggars who won't hear of any guard. . . ."

"That's always admitting," interposed Ramsden, "I carried something of value."

"Uh-huh. Sure. On top of that, the narks get wind that Flamande is somehow fully acquainted with what you're doing. That," said H.M., pointing his cigar with such fervor that the ashes flew wide, "that's goin' to put the breeze up everybody, because this is an international matter. There's one way out: they can set a trap for Flamande, baited with sugar and deep enough to hold him *if* he falls into it. Then everybody's happy. But there's one snag. They've got to have the consent of Whitehall, which might be more than a little difficult. And they've got to have a branch of the British police workin' with 'em, so as to make the whole thing official. In fact, I fail to see how they could very well have got along without your own consent."

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"You intimate," said Ramsden, "that I knew what was going to happen tonight, eh?" He considered again. "Well, there's one thing I'll be prodded into saying. Word of honor, the things that have been going on in this place tonight are as much of a surprise to me as to — any of the rest of us. That I'll even swear to! But you interest me. Go on."

"My guess," continued H.M., "is that two members of our own Intelligence Department were asked for. They were asked to act on blind orders, so that they didn't know (and at first going-off Whitehall itself didn't know) what they were supposed to do, except that it was in the laudable intent of guardin' Sir G. Ramsden.

"But in the meantime two things happened. Whitehall learned what Gasquet's scheme was, and exploded. The agents would be goin' to protect Ramsden, yes; *after* he had been deliberately run into a trap, while on a government mission of some delicacy, to catch a criminal whose doings were none of our business. I ask you, now! Would even Squiffy stand for a thing like that? He'd talk to the Foreign Office, and they'd absolutely refuse to touch or sanction it. The agents would be recalled. Only, d'ye see, they'd already started on their blind orders and nobody knew where to reach 'em.

"What does Gasquet do? Right, says he! We'll omit the British agents altogether, drop 'em and tell 'em nothing, but we'll go through with the scheme just the same. And the second thing that happened was that he decided to make the plan more fancy by using this château rather than the inn. I dunno how he came to decide this." H.M. closed one eye. "Maybe Gasquet in Marseilles ran into his friend the real D'Andrieu, who was there chasin' his wife, and borrowed this place from him. Maybe ——"

"Won't do," said Ramsden. "The analysis, if you can call it that, is sound enough except for one thing. Do you think that, if our people at home had refused to sanction this trap with me as the tethered kid, Gasquet and his backers would ever have dared go through with it?"

H.M. stared at the fire. "I see I've got to begin workin' and unwind the whole business," he said. "I've hesitated, because after all it's Gasquet's show and I can't bust it up. Particularly as *you're* the one who's most concerned; and, since I think you've given your consent ——"

"To Gasquet's show?"

"To Gasquet's show. You said it yourself: without some hint or tip-off to you, Gasquet's backers would never have dared let him hocus that plane and

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drop you down here. You're no fool, though you've tried to act like one tonight. I don't think you knew who 'Gasquet' was going to turn out to be. I don't think you knew that the forcin' down of the plane would be Gasquet's work. But I do think there'd been a little whisper of some kind in your ear. Then why did you risk lettin' yourself in for it? Look here, you were entrusted to bring the unicorn to London, hey? You've acknowledged that?"

"Quite."

"Uh-huh. And what would you estimate as bein' the worth of that rare animal?"

Ramsden hesitated. Then he chuckled. "Right you are," he said in a somewhat different voice. "I've had enough of my own private mystification, eh? The whole confounded business will be in the newspapers to-morrow. You want to know about its value. In importance, that animal is worth literally a kingdom. In mere monetary value — well, possibly only a million pounds."

"Only a million pounds," said Middleton. "And you weren't afraid to walk into a thieves' kitchen with Flamande?"

"Not in the least," said Ramsden. "Because, you see, I haven't got it."

"Uh-huh," said H.M. woodenly, while Middleton whistled and I swore.

"Glad to say," pursued Ramsden, "that it's now stabled and on its way to London in the middle of a squadron of Royal Air Force planes. It should be there by now, in time for the Jubilee reception to-morrow. If Flamande was meant to attack me, the plan's gone bust. I haven't got it."

"*God in heaven,*" said a voice across the room, "must you tell it to everybody?"

The door was slammed shut, and we were looking at the cool, cynical, but no longer amiable face of the detective Gasquet who called himself D'Andrieu.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

H.M. GAVE A GUSTY SIGH. "That's torn it," he admitted. "Sorry, son. I'm afraid we forgot ourselves and talked with considerable frankness."

D'Andrieu looked from one to the other of us, sardonically.

"You call it frankness?" he said. "In case you don't know it, you were shouting like a Chamber of Deputies." His eyes narrowed. "Well, gentlemen, it may

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interest you to know that between the two of you you have succeeded in wrecking the whole plan. Exactly what chance have you given me to capture Flamande in the act?"

"In the act of what?" said Ramsden. "If you mean in the act of murdering me, no, thanks. Bit too much to expect, don't you think? What chance have you given me to escape him?"

"You agreed to coöperate."

Ramsden grunted. "In what? Mysterious chap from the Quai d'Orsay says, Would I mind taking part in a little police-trap to catch Flamande, of which I can't hear any details? He warns me, all fair and square, that Whitehall may not like it. He relies on my instinct for a bloody good row. I said I didn't mind. And here I am. But as for the unicorn . . ."

H.M. scowled. "Yes, it's a wicked maze we're treadin'. Still and all, I don't think you ought to feel so upset. You've got Flamande cornered even if you don't know who he is. He's here, shut up on this island with no way out. And he's got to be one of us. If necessary, you can always shove the whole lot of us into clink. I was goin' to suggest ——"

"It will not be necessary," said D'Andrieu. "The masks are off now. You know who I am, and I can tell you what I think. I have succeeded in exactly what I set out to do. I know who Flamande is."

"Uh-huh. Do you mean that," said H.M., "or do you just mean that you've been writin' more letters to yourself?"

D'Andrieu smiled.

"I mean that I have found the horn of the unicorn," he said. "I have found the weapon with which the murder was done, and I know exactly how it was done."

"And you know who used it?" asked Ramsden, while an ugly silence settled down.

"I know who used it. I found it in the possession of a certain guest in this house. Did you say I had failed? Auguste!"

Auguste, highly satisfied, opened the door. I noticed that in his inside breast pocket there was a long bulge, which he tapped as though to make sure of its pressure. D'Andrieu had resumed his amiable air.

"Will you ask all my guests," he said, "whether they will have the goodness to come in here?"

It was like a whip-crack. He was cool, he was assured, and something deadly

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had begun to gather in that room where the little grayish Mephistopheles sat smiling by the fire.

"Full-dress performance ——" muttered Ramsden, and hesitated. He glanced at H.M. H.M. seemed groping to find the right words.

"Listen, son," he said at length, and in a low, heavy voice. "I warn you: *for God's sake, be careful!* If you let your instinct for the dramatic carry you too far, there'll be a blinkin' awful mess. I know you're smartin' under what this chap's got away with. So am I. But take it easy, or I tell you in all seriousness matters will be much worse. I mean it."

"So am I," D'Andrieu concurred. "You realize that I have found the weapon in the possession of one of my guests, and I can offer a logical explanation of how the crime was committed? I *can* prove something, as you will see. Will you come in?"

He turned towards the door, towards the five people who completed our group. What they might know or guess now I could not tell; but they must have felt the stir in the air. D'Andrieu's sharp and ominous self-confidence had given a different atmosphere to the place. Elsa hung back, looking quickly between Middleton and D'Andrieu to see what might have happened. Middleton went to her reassuringly, and whispered something. Evelyn was staring at me. Hayward, Hébert, and Fowler followed them in.

"Found the murderer?" asked Fowler.

"I have," replied D'Andrieu. "He is in this room now.

"A great deal has happened in the last half-hour. So much, that we cannot go into it now. But positions have changed, values have altered, and I have found the horn of the unicorn."

"What the hell's all this?" demanded Hayward, and jerked up his head.

The hooked nose, the bright pouched eyes, the broadening grin turned round. "I am Gaston Gasquet, sir, and very much at Flamande's service. Do you understand that? The man who was killed does not much matter — except that he was not Gasquet, and that Flamande killed him. I should have preferred to keep my identity secret. I should have preferred to capture Flamande in the act of stealing what he came to steal. Unfortunately, someone has blurted out a truth which makes that impossible. Flamande will not make the attempt. Nevertheless, I know him."

For several seconds nobody spoke or (I am certain) thought of speaking. But everybody moved back a little.

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It was Fowler who broke through the mist. Fowler took out a cigarette, walked straight over to the fireplace, and bent down past D'Andrieu to light a twist of paper.

"Sorry, sir," he said perfunctorily. "You were saying?"

"I was saying that I have taken over the investigation in order to avoid more unfortunate mistakes by — our English friend Merrivale." He paused. "Let me show you the weapon that was really used. Auguste!" The big major-domo stepped inside the door, and D'Andrieu went on: "Let me have the little toy, Auguste."

From under his coat Auguste took as weird and deadly-looking a mechanism as I have ever seen. In general shape it was not unlike an automatic pistol, but it was larger, heavier, and more solid than the highest calibered gun. It was about eleven inches long, made of solid steel except for the wooden grip, and must have weighed four pounds. But no bullet or missile could be fired from it: the muzzle was flanged, and in the opening of the barrel we could see a sharp circle which looked like the end of a rod measuring about a sixteenth of an inch in diameter. D'Andrieu, with a quick wrench, broke the barrel open sideways near the breech. Inside there was what looked like a chamber to contain one cartridge, set against a powerful spring mechanism in the barrel.

"You recognize it? This," said D'Andrieu, "is the butcher's Humane-Killer of what is called the captive-bolt variety. It has superseded the pole-ax. By law, the slaughtering of animals must be done painlessly, instantaneously, and without possibility of bungling. The best theoretical means would be a bullet; but then there must be no bullet to be wedged in the carcass so that it has to be cut out. Hence this variation of the bullet-principle has been invented — a sort of pole-ax spike attached as a part of the gun, but propelled by the explosion of a cartridge against a spring mechanism. The rod is more powerful than any bullet. It makes so quick and sharp a puncture that it can be pulled out immediately, and the gun is re-set easily by pushing the bolt back into the barrel with the palm of your hand. This gun is of English manufacture. You see now what the 'horn of the unicorn' actually was."

Middleton spoke shakily. "Put the thing away, will you? 'Humane-Killer!' What a word! Is this straight? Do you mean a human being was killed with that thing?"

"Yes. You agree, Dr. Hébert?"

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"*C'est absolument vrai. . . .*" murmured Hébert, as though from awe.

"This," said Hayward, whose face stood out pallid and red-mottled, "looks like business. Don't stall us now! Quit the acting! Where'd you get the thing? Where'd you find it? Whose is it?"

D'Andrieu paid no attention. I glanced at Fowler, who stood with his shoulders humped and a bright blind glitter in his eyes, drawing in quick breaths at his cigarette without taking it from his mouth. He did not speak. Then I looked at H.M. So did D'Andrieu.

"And you agree, my friend?" D'Andrieu asked him.

"Uh-huh. Oh, yes." H.M. shook his head dully. "I mean, that was the weapon right enough. Point is, how do you think it was used? That gun has to be held directly against the victim's forehead, y'know. How do you think it was used against the feller who was killed, when nobody was seen near him?"

"That is what I purpose to explain. Now, my friends, you will all be quiet," said D'Andrieu, turning and speaking in such a voice that we were all quiet. "Certain things must be made clear before I turn over a prisoner," he nodded towards Auguste, "to Detective-Sergeant Allain.

"This pistol, certainly, could only have been used by being held directly against the victim's head. And since nobody could have approached the victim up in the gallery above, it follows that at the time he put his hands before his face, screamed, and tumbled forward, *he was not yet touched.*

"Consider. Can any witness here actually swear that he or she saw a wound in that man's face before he tumbled down? No. What was seen? A person who instinctively put his hands before his face, screamed, and at the same time missed his footing as he was about to take the first step. He stumbled . . . why? Obviously because of something he saw down on the landing. Put his hands before his face and screamed . . . why? Obviously because he saw, down on that landing, his enemy. And in his enemy's hand was what he thought to be an ordinary heavy automatic, being aimed at him then.

"What happened is tolerably clear. Flamande was behind that tapestry, waiting for his quarry to come down. He stepped out a little too soon, before he should have done so. At the same moment, just as the victim appeared at the head of the stairs, Flamande also saw Mrs. Middleton appear beyond the balustrade in the gallery. It is clear that Flamande did an instinctive thing.

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He dodged, to avoid being seen; he dodged down towards the floor of the landing, in those few feet which Mrs. Middleton could not see. But the victim at the head of the stairs saw him, to all intents aiming a pistol at him. The victim threw up his hands just as he was about to take a step down, screamed as he missed his footing, and plunged. Flamande acted — before the man could go downstairs and betray him. Flamande was crouched so low that he could not be seen either from above or below. As the victim struck the landing in a stunned condition, Flamande put the muzzle of his 'humane-killer' to his forehead, pulled the trigger, and instantly drew out the bolt. On the landing lay the letter-file which the victim had dropped. Flamande swept it up as he gave the body on the edge a push, and he dodged behind the tapestry. All (considering the rapidity with which an actual pistol could have been used) the work of not more than three seconds. In the third second, Mr. Fowler had run to the top of the stairs; and by his own testimony what did he see? He saw the tapestry agitated as the dead man rolled past, which he attributed to the dead man's having seized it. But it was actually the movement made by Flamande in dodging inside."

The thing was brilliant, and it was possible, and I believed it. But the explanation was broken short as Fowler jumped forward.

"If you believe that," he said, and his mouth was so dry that the cigarette stuck to it; he burnt his fingers trying to pull it out. "If you believe I told the truth, then you don't really believe I'm guilty after all?"

"I never did believe it, my friend," replied D'Andrieu. "Shall I go on? I have almost finished. Flamande then works instantly. Before the dead man has rolled to the foot of the stairs, Flamande is out of the window behind the tapestry (which I beg of you to recall we found unlocked afterwards), and out upon the flat roof. In the next moment he is up the low buttress, and through the window of Mr. Hayward's room (on whose sill Auguste found not half an hour ago some very significant mud-stains), and out into the gallery about twenty seconds after he has fired his bolt."

D'Andrieu suddenly rapped his hand on the flat top of the mantelpiece.

"There is no use in going on. I have the man. That gun and the box of cartridges were found, a short time ago, in the false bottom of his own valise — where he hid them. He is Flamande, and he will go to the guillotine. You wish

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to know who he is and what he calls himself? With pleasure. He stands . . . there."

And then this brilliant fool, with a gesture straight out of the Grand Guignol, turned round and bowed towards me.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I TRIED TO MUSTER my wits. Then I heard H.M. groan. H.M. looked as though he were not sure whether he ought to grin or swear.

"I been afraid of this," he said. "Burn me, I been afraid of this ever since G. Gasquet walked into this room and all the time so carefully *refrained* from ever lookin' at you or castin' one word in your direction, Ken! He wanted his dramatic effect not to be spoiled. Look here, Gasquet-D'Andrieu: seriously, I got a suspicion you accidentally found that gun planted in Ken's room, and then you worked backwards to all these logical deductions and convinced yourself you'd reasoned it all out in advance. Then, when you flung the accusation into Ken's guilty schnozzle . . ."

"There's nothing guilty about my schnozzle," I said. "Let's straighten this out. What the devil do you mean, the only person in this house who could have committed the crime?"

"Exactly what I say. Come, don't lose your temper, and I will demonstrate it to you. The gun again, Auguste!"

He was very persuasive. I think it was not the wicked grin on Auguste's face, but something very much like admiration in his eyes, which made me fully realize that these people honestly did believe I was Flamande. I did not look at the others.

"You see," pursued D'Andrieu, "it was Sir Henry Merrivale, in what it would grieve me to call his senile dotage, who gave you the opportunity to do what nobody else could have done. He has been most helpful to you all evening. . . . Now look at this gun. It weighs four pounds, and it is of enormous size. A person, at a time of excitement when nobody looked at him with any care, might have concealed it under his coat for only a very few moments for it would be apparent to the most casual observer.

"But during every moment of the time after we discovered that body, every

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one of you has been under observation *for every second*, either by me, or by Auguste, or by my other three men. From that time until this, not one of you had any opportunity to go to Mr. Blake's room . . . except Mr. Blake himself.

"Immediately after the murder, you recall, we all crowded upstairs in a body. A few seconds more, and the presence of the gun must have been suspected, for we were going to turn on the lights. Nobody left our group — except Mr. Blake. Sir Henry Merrivale very kindly sent him down to his own room to find a flashlight. He was gone for some moments. . . ."

"I suppose you don't believe," I said, "that I was trying to find out what was wrong with a broken flashlight?"

D'Andrieu was polite. "I am afraid I don't, old friend. This gave him the opportunity to do two things. First he concealed the pistol. Then he put a portable typewriter under his coat; and, since it was not distinguishable in the darkness, he hurried down the gallery and entered . . . where? The linen closet, you recall, where Merrivale and I were standing. You will remark that we three were the only ones who ventured inside that linen closet? Yes. Exactly. When the typewriter was put down, he was able to drop his note . . . where? Just outside the door.

"Then there is the question of shoes."

(They must all be looking at my feet now. So was I, guiltily. My shoes were not in the best condition after their mud-slogging that night, but they gave me an unpleasant suggestion. I sent a snaky and felon-like eye down round the circle of shoes. H.M.'s, Ramsden's, and Hébert's were muddy — but then none of them had gone upstairs to change, and all had perfect alibis. The rest of the shoes shone in my mind like some motion-picture director's effort at symbolism. There were Hayward's sport-shoes in brown leather and white buckskin. There were Fowler's neat black ones, long, narrow, and polished. There were Middleton's brown, scuffed and disreputable, but not muddy. There were Evelyn's and Elsa's white high-heels.)

"Your error will already have occurred to you," said D'Andrieu. "You will be thinking of those mud-stains on the window-sill where you climbed back into the house. Everyone upstairs changed his shoes before the murder, since nobody has had an opportunity to do so since. Everybody has clean shoes . . . except, of course, yourself. You did not change."

"I only brought an overnight bag," I said, "and didn't have an extra pair with me. Otherwise ——"

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"Otherwise," beamed D'Andrieu, "you would have changed when you were sent down to your room after the 'flashlight'? Come, I am glad to hear that! My old friend, my unseen friend, I am glad to see that you supply the gaps in our knowledge and accept it in that spirit of sportsmanship which . . . ah, you smile!"

"Ha, ha, ha," I said bitterly, and accented each ha. For the first time I turned round to the rest of the group. "Believe it or not, I am *not* Flamande. There is *not* a false bottom in my valise, nor are there any rabbits in my hat. Do *you* believe it, Ramsden?"

Middleton was looking at me curiously, clucking his tongue. "Blake, my lad, you're in a jam and there's no denying it. But against my better judgment I still don't think you're Flamande. There's something very, very fishy about the whole business. Besides, my room is the next one to Hayward's, where you were supposed to have come out. I think I'd have seen you if you had come out. My impression is that you ran past me from the other end of the gallery. . . ."

"Exactly," said Evelyn. She marched out with her face flaming, and stared at D'Andrieu. "You old fool," she said. "I've got just this to say for your nonsense. Nobody seems to have asked where he was all this time he was supposed to be crawling in and out of windows. I'll tell you. He was with me. That's what's known as an alibi. And, if you believe all you say, it would have to mean I was an accomplice, wouldn't it?"

D'Andrieu looked at her not unkindly.

"You force me to bring it up, Miss Cheyne. The fact is, I do regard you as an accomplice, and I have regarded you as an accomplice all evening."

"Oh, my eye," groaned H.M. "That's done it. So she's Flamande's beautiful, slant-eyed mistress, hey, who pinches the plans from Cabinet Ministers? Burn me, son, but accordin' to you *I* been guilty of some very rummy behavior tonight! Why don't you make a clean sweep of it and shove us all in clink?"

"Perhaps I will," said D'Andrieu, wheeling round. He had begun to lose his suavity a little. "If I were you, I should not presume too much on your real (or fancied) position in the British government. You must remember that I am in charge here, and I can give such orders as I please. Frankly, I do not care to hear any more of your suggestions. Your suggestions have already cost one man his life, and served nearly to ruin my entire investigation. You

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have done your persistent best to shield a man who has fooled your poor old fuddled wits into believing that his name is 'Kenwood Blake.' Therefore ——"

"Will you listen to me, you overgrown gnome?" suddenly yelled H.M., and brought down a blow on the arm of the chair that cracked the wood across. "Will you listen to me while I tell you one single, small, solitary thing? I'm tellin' you, *I know which one of these fellers Flamande really is!* If you'll let me tell you what to do, just for a second ——"

"Sergeant Allain," said D'Andrieu, and drew himself up curtly.

"Monsieur?" said Auguste.

"If Sir Henry Merrivale," D'Andrieu told him with cool politeness, "should feel it incumbent on himself to interfere any further, or suggest courses for us, you are to place him under arrest. Is that clear?"

"No, I'm damned if I'll stand for that!" bawled Ramsden, as H.M. uprose like a volcano to suggest a real course. "Sit down, Merrivale! As for you, Gasquet, that's carrying things too far! If ——"

"Excuse me," I interrupted, "but there has been so chronic and general a losing of tempers in the last few minutes that maybe you'll now be willing to listen to a word from the crafty villain. Do you mind if I say something?"

"Well done," said Fowler. He spoke for the first time, with a sort of harsh approval. "You're Flamande, right enough, but you're keeping your nerve. I dare say you're keeping it just because you are Flamande. Why did you kill that chap, and who was he?"

D'Andrieu also had himself well in hand.

"I have been looking forward so long to this meeting," he remarked, "that I shall take pleasure in a talk. What do you wish to say?"

"I want a chance to clear myself, that's all."

"You still deny it? You are challenging me again? Very well. Sir George Ramsden: You told us earlier this evening that you could testify to the identity of this man. Are you sure you can testify to it now?"

"No, I'm not," replied Ramsden, and the ground went from under my feet. "Mind!" he insisted. "I think — no, blast it, I don't know! I never knew Blake very well. And a nodding acquaintance isn't good enough." He faced me. "You may be Ken Blake. You may not be. I don't make a decision there. What I do say is that, whether you're Blake or not, you did commit this murder. Can you deny the evidence of the murder? If H.M. says you're Ken

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Blake, I'll agree with it. But what about plain evidence?"

Unfortunately, I could see that coming. If I brought everybody in St. James's to swear to my identity, there was still a small matter of a murder charge. I glanced at H.M., who sat down again, quietly, and was as wooden as though he heard nothing.

"Your defense, M. Fl — Mr. Blake?" prompted D'Andrieu, in a tone that stung like the devil.

"Right!" I said. "This foolishness is all based on the assumption that I hid behind the tapestry, climbed out of the window, and climbed back in again through Mr. Hayward's window. There seems to be something you've overlooked. If I climbed through that window, as you say I did; and if Mr. Hayward was in his room, as he says he was, he must have seen me. Have you asked him whether he can swear he saw me?"

Hayward was sitting back on the sofa, one arm along the back of it, studying me through half-shut eyes while he chewed at the tip of a cigar. His big glasses were a little mesmeric. Queerly enough, he seemed almost friendly.

After a pause he spoke.

"No, I didn't see you come through the room; but if they put me under oath I couldn't swear whether you did or you didn't. Understand, I'd turned out my lamp just about a second before I heard that scream."

"Turned out your lamp?"

"You're the one who's supposed to be answering questions," he corrected, making a little circle with the cigar. "But you might as well ask what you can and get the benefit. Turned out my lamp, yes. I was going down to the bathroom, and then I was going on downstairs. Just after I turned it out, I heard that yell. I stood there in the dark wondering what to do — and not feeling any too good, I can tell you. I started to light the lamp again, and couldn't find any matches. So I ran and opened the door."

"What did you do then?" I asked.

"Waited there until I saw a gang of 'em gather up at the head of the stairs. Yes, you were among 'em. When you all started down, I ran up and joined the crowd. Now come on, sonny! Ask away!"

"Good! I will! You waited there in the doorway, then, and so you know that nobody could have come from the room behind you and slipped out past you into the gallery?"

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"Whoa there! That," said Hayward, and grinned sleepily, "is what you call leading the witness. No, I didn't stay in the door. I moved out in the hall, about four or five feet away from the door, so I could see better."

"Yet," I said, "wouldn't you have heard somebody, even if you didn't see him? Footsteps? Somebody opening the window, crossing the room, and coming out behind you?"

"N-no, not necessarily. The storm was making a good deal of a racket, and the carpets are soft, and I was all eyes and ears hot on what was going on up in the gallery. No, I've got to admit . . ."

"There is no use going on with this," said D'Andrieu. "In fact, Mr. Blake's questioning has been good enough to supply me with the last point I needed to be certain of his guilt. . . . So Mr. Hayward turned out the lamp just before the scream? Excellent! I wondered why Flamande had dared to come in by the window and risk finding the occupant there. From below he saw that the light was out. He naturally assumed that the occupant had gone. Hence he climbed up without hesitation. I don't want to hurry you, M. Flamande, but we can't go into any more of this now. On the road to Paris, perhaps. You see, I have plans for you. You will be in Paris by daylight. So will your charming colleague, Miss Cheyne."

"I might 'a' known!" boomed H.M.

"You might have known, of course," agreed D'Andrieu, who was affable again, "that we should never have thought of arranging this little trap without a way out of it. We even have a car. Very shortly I can promise Miss Cheyne and M. Flamande lodgings of a rather more austere kind than these, in the questioning-cages on the Quai des Orfevres."

Hayward sat up.

"Wa-ait a minute!" he urged. "Isn't this fellow going to ask me any more questions?"

"I don't think we've got time for it," I said. "But suppose we strike a bargain. If you agree not to connect Miss Cheyne with this business in any way ——"

"Take it easy, you dummy!" breathed H.M. out of the corner of his mouth. "That's what he's tryin' to get you to say. Ask Hayward the question *he* wants answered. . . ."

"Just a quick one," Hayward was saying. "Blake, you'd make a rotten

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lawyer. There's an old habit I have — never go into a strange house and leave the room without doing it — sort of habit of mine — lots of people have it — funny thing ——"

"What," I said, "did you do just before you blew out the lamp, Mr. Hayward?"

Hayward sat back with an expiring sigh.

"I locked the window," he said.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

MY STOCK WAS RISING. This last bit of evidence, if I could back it up, might weigh as heavily as that damning pistol, my absence from the group, and the muddy shoes. By one of those inexplicable swings of opinion which are as incalculable as a roulette-wheel, popular sympathy seemed to be slowly turning in my direction.

Evelyn crowed. "But that breaks down the whole case, doesn't it?" She looked at H.M. and spoke almost angrily. "Oh, dash it all, why don't you say something? I never knew you to stay out of a scrum before. Are you really afraid of his threats about arresting you? Well, I'm not. If he's going to get one of us, let's all go to clink together."

"*Et tu, Calpurnia,*" said H.M., and shook his head. "You let Cæsar alone. I got my reasons." He grew querulous. "Let him conduct his own defense — if he can. By the way, D'Andrieu, how were you intendin' to get out of this place?"

D'Andrieu stared hard at H.M. and chuckled.

"You ask how I plan to leave here, with my prisoners? A collapsible bridge of army-engineering pattern. Joseph and Jean Baptiste will be at work on it shortly. In about half an hour the river will be running smoothly enough to risk laying it down."

"With your prisoners?" cried Hayward. "Hey, hold on there! What about this business of the window? Everybody admits he was running from the other end of the gallery when he came to that staircase, so he couldn't have got up through Fowler's window. Besides, Fowler's light was on. If he didn't get back

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through my window, how did he get back? Are you telling me I didn't lock that window in good faith?"

"No."

"Then just what do you think you are saying, governor? I'm willing to bet you can't burgle those windows. They haven't just got ordinary catches, like our windows. They're built like a little door, with a knob in the middle that runs a rod down into the sill when you turn the catch. You'd have to cut out a piece of glass or something ——"

"You see," interposed D'Andrieu, "I don't think you noticed that the catch of the window was broken."

Hayward sat back.

"I still don't believe it!" said Middleton gloomily. "Look here, my room is just beyond Hayward's on the other side of the cross-gallery. I jumped out not very long after this scream, and if Blake had sneaked out of Hayward's room I think I'd have been certain to see him."

"Let us close the business by asking you about that," agreed D'Andrieu. "You are positive you would have seen him? The gallery was not too dark?"

"No. I came out to my door as soon as I heard the yell. I stood looking down the gallery right past Hayward's room — until someone ran past me from behind (I know now it was Blake), and then I went for the stairs. All that time I was looking down the gallery, and I didn't see anybody."

"Precisely so," purred D'Andrieu. "It was so dark that you could not even see Mr. Hayward himself, standing a few feet out from his own door."

"Friends all," I said, after a pause, "the master-criminal is damned grateful for your good wishes, but would you mind not trying to give me any more assistance? Every time somebody tries to give me a helping hand, back I go deeper into the soup."

Middleton swore. "You're only twisting things round, Gasquet! I didn't say that."

"Let us see if we can discover what you did say. You change your mind now, and announce that you did see Mr. Hayward ahead of you?"

"Well, I suppose it must have been Hayward. There was somebody there — a kind of shadow, if you know what I mean ——"

"Which might just as well have been Mr. Blake as Mr. Hayward. Thank you. It is only fair to inform you," said D'Andrieu, "that Louis, outside the

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door now, has been occupied for some time in taking shorthand notes of this entire conversation. You see, my friend, the real D'Andrieu, informed me that this room is constructed on the principle of a whispering gallery; it is why I chose it; and the smallest sound can be heard at the door. To round matters out, we will identify a few things. Louis!"

The door opened. One of the footmen, a squat bruiser in buttons, stuffed a notebook into his pocket as he looked in.

"You have," D'Andrieu said in French, "the valise of M. Flamande, which he says does not have a false bottom?"

"Yes, monsieur."

D'Andrieu turned to me. "Merely to make sure there is no mistake, will you tell us what you had in your valise? Thank you. Bring it here, Louis, and take the articles out as he names them. Pyjamas. Dressing-gown. Slippers. Socks. Shirt. Shaving tack ——"

Again this crazy conspiracy turned my wits upside down. "Those are my things," I said, "but it's not my bag. Mine was a black . . . well, some kind of leather. That's a brown pigskin. Ask ——"

"Ask Miss Cheyne?" inquired D'Andrieu. "Thank you, no. Who else can identify it? You say it is not your bag. Come, my friend! This is unworthy of you. Now you say that someone not only 'planted' that Humane-Killer in your room, but also gave you a different bag in which all your clothing is mysteriously stored. When did anyone have an opportunity to do this? Did you open your bag when you went upstairs tonight before the murder?"

"Yes, and it was all right then! It was a black — oh, hell!"

Auguste, or Sergeant Allain, stepped forward. "I can assure you, M. Flamande," he told me, "that I myself took the bag (that brown bag) from your car, and carried it up to your room."

"Let us continue," suggested D'Andrieu. "You have been telling us about your possessions. Is there nothing else you have neglected to mention?"

"Maybe. I don't know. Nothing important."

D'Andrieu put a finger before his face and wagged it slowly. "No? No? Not, for instance, a Browning automatic pistol with one cartridge exploded recently? When and why, I wonder, did you fire that shot?"

(The blasted gun, of course, which Evelyn had pinched on the road, and which I had forgotten. It was on the tip of my tongue to deny it was mine,

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when I thought of the chasm this would open under our feet if I tried to explain. But there was something else to come.)

"And one other thing? A notebook in a lady's handwriting, which I dare say we could show to be Miss Cheyne's handwriting," continued our host, "gleefully and carefully chronicling a full list of Flamande's exploits — with information as to his methods which could be known to Flamande alone."

That tore it. Round us now was a circle of stony faces, and it was obvious that with the exception of H.M. not one person in the group believed us. But this apparent victory might be our way out.

H.M. spoke up.

"Oh, I dunno," he protested, as mildly as a cooing dove. "The police know it, y'see. Look here, son, there's something you ought to know, and I've been wonderin' why she hasn't brought it up herself. I know it's forbidden except as a last resort, but this strikes me as a last resort for all your money. . . . She's a member of the Intelligence Department; oh, far from intelligent, I admit! Her purpose is merely to be charming. I vouch for that. And even if you think I'm a senile bungler, you'll admit I'm not a liar?"

Evelyn drew a deep breath of relief. "At last!" she said, and made a face at him. "The chief has spoken up. 'If you get into trouble, our officials can give you no help.' I jolly well know what that means now! The question is whether he'll believe me even when I prove who I am."

D'Andrieu considered her, weighing something in his eyes.

"True, Miss Cheyne. That's the question. You understand, I might agree without hesitation that you are exactly what you claim — and still know that you were a colleague of Flamande. If you are what you say. . . . Of course you will have proof?"

While she removed her wrist watch, and pried open a thin shell of gold at the back, I found a course. Evelyn could get out of it; I would tell the truth, that I had been an impostor convincing her I was an Intelligence agent. I would add that I had hoaxed her all along, because I was Flamande. The thing was to prove that she had become involved innocently in the mess (which was quite true); afterwards, when she was well out of it, I could fight my own battle to prove I wasn't guilty of murder. Obviously, the only course was to be Flamande now. What interested me most was whether I ought to strike a flamboyant attitude like Flamande at bay, or whether ——

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"This seems quite in order, Miss Cheyne," declared D'Andrieu, examining the gray slip of paper she handed him. His eyes filmed over. "In fact, I happen to remember it is quite in order. You were one of the two originally intended as a guard for . . . ?" He nodded towards Ramsden.

"She was," I said. "Do you think Flamande didn't know that?"

D'Andrieu whipped round.

"Then you admit ——?"

Everybody moved back a little. What I wanted to do was toss off something flowery, something in the best Adelphi tradition. It seemed rather an anti-climax to say, "Right-ho!" as though I were accepting a drink. I started one speech, saw it wouldn't do, and what I eventually managed to proclaim was:

"Flamande? Oh, absolutely. What's the matter with you? You've been trying to prove it all evening, haven't you?"

"He's a dreadful liar, you know," said Evelyn, and laughed in my face.

And such is the innate, low perverseness of all human affairs; such is the weird unreliability of the human mind; that for the first time I saw in D'Andrieu's eyes a faint narrowing of wonder. It was not doubt. It was only wonder.

"Don't you believe me?" inquired Evelyn cheerfully. "He was the other agent sent with me. And the Service isn't so corrupt that both of us can be crooked. Shall I show you? Grab him, Auguste, and feel in his upper left-hand waistcoat pocket!"

This was evidently action to Auguste's taste. I was wrenched round before I could move, and the gray slip of paper was plucked out. D'Andrieu, stroking his mustache, received the paper.

"Where did you get this?" he asked sharply. And, over that slip of paper which should have been the most overwhelming proof of my guilt, he frowned.

"I stole it."

"It's his own," said Evelyn. "Do you think everybody in the British service is a crook and a murderer?"

"I don't know about that," put in Hayward in a wild voice, "but I'm beginning to think that everybody in the British service is stark, raving crazy. Is this part of the fool business you were talking about early tonight, when you assaulted a lot of policemen who were trying to steal your passport? . . . Listen, Gasquet: this fellow's either innocent or bughouse, but do you think if he's Flamande he would have had the nerve to tell us a story like that right at the beginning?"

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I turned on him.

"It's absolutely true. I stole that paper from the real agent. That's his gun, by the way; I didn't have one. He'd seen me with Evelyn, and got suspicious. I thought his gun was a cigarette-case. He — well, he and two policemen stopped the car. There was a bit of a dust-up, and I had to lay them out. What I'm trying to say is that Miss Cheyne knows absolutely nothing of this business, except innocently. Good God, won't you even believe what I say when I admit I'm guilty?"

"I wonder what the game is," muttered Fowler, who had got up and was walking jerkily about the room. "It'll have occurred to you, M. Gasquet, that this is probably a trick."

"If it's a trick," Hayward rasped, "then he ought to be doing it on the stage. Let me butt in here. You're asking us to believe that you, unarmed and single-handed, attacked three armed men and laid them out because you thought they had stolen your passport?"

"What a man!" exclaimed Hébert. "Ah, name of heaven, what a man!"

"Wait a minute, now. As regards all this stealing," insisted Hayward, "did you steal anything else?"

"Drummond's fountain-pen. I told you about that."

"That's right. So you did! I thought you were a little bughouse then, and I'm just remembering a lot of things. You stole that piece of paper, you stole his fountain-pen, and you also stole his gun because you thought it was a cigarette-case? Is that right?"

I said: "Oh, what's the use? I admit I'm Flamande; isn't that enough? Suppose we start for Paris and get this over with. No, I won't make a bolt for it. Bring out the handcuffs."

"One moment," D'Andrieu interposed. "Just what does Miss Cheyne have to say to all these adventures?"

Evelyn was impatient. "Don't you see it's all made up, because he's not guilty of anything at all and he's only trying to shield me? Would Flamande act like that; would a murderer act like that? Don't you see he's even gone so far as to deny that he's a member of the Intelligence ——"

"Well," said Hayward critically, "I don't see very well how he could claim he was. Are you telling us that *nothing* happened back on that road?"

"Of course I am," returned Evelyn, with such a fervor of innocence that my jaw dropped. "Earlier tonight he was pulling your legs because that man,"

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she nodded towards D'Andrieu, "was acting so silky and foolish about the letters he said he received from Flamande. And now he's trying to put across his joke in earnest, because he wants to get me out of trouble. He's even denied he's in the service. Well, there's Sir Henry Merrivale. Why don't you ask him whether he's a member or not?"

"Aha!" H.M. said, with some glee. "I've been waitin' all evening for somebody to bring up a point that would make our good Gasquet dubious . . . just a little dubious . . . only a faint cloud-shadow on the dial. Oh, my eye. 'What is Truth?' asked jesting Pilate, and . . ."

"I am waiting for your answer," snapped D'Andrieu. "I do not say it alters matters in the least. You understand that they will have to be taken to Paris under arrest? But is this man a genuine secret ser ——?"

"Sure he is, son. I gave him that certificate myself only a day ago."

"And this matter of the fountain-pen? We did see a fountain-pen, you know, with the name 'Harvey Drummond' on it. What about that?"

"Oh, Lord, son, don't you understand it all yet?" growled H.M. with some plaintiveness. "Ken happened to have borrowed a fountain-pen, days ago, from the real Harvey Drummond. And tonight in walks an impostor who says *he's* Harvey Drummond. Ken knew he wasn't. So he used that tale, with which he'd been pullin' your legs a few minutes beforehand, just to see if he could confuse the impostor still more. You'll notice he did."

"So there was no trouble whatever on the Levai road to-night?"

"At last you got it. There wasn't."

D'Andrieu stroked his mustache. There was a wary, sardonic gleam in his eyes; but I think that this string of whoppers had really shaken his belief in my guilt. He stared hard at me.

"Do you admit this to be the truth?" he demanded.

"I bow to the inevitable, M. Gasquet."

"Well, we shall see. If Sir Henry Merrivale has lied to me — Sergeant Allain!"

"Monsieur?"

"Miss Cheyne and Mr. Blake are to be placed under technical arrest. You will take them upstairs to Mr. Blake's room and stand guard over them yourself. Search him beforehand. You yourself will be armed, and you will shoot without question if he makes any attempt to escape . . . Louis!" He looked at his watch. "So! It is now, my friends, a good deal past four o'clock. Louis,

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you will see whether the river has subsided enough to put up our bridge. Some of us will undoubtedly be going to Paris before long, but I shall insist that the rest remain. All right, Sergeant."

"He still thinks you're a murderer, son," murmured H.M., "but he's not so absolutely certain now. You and the wench go on up and play cards with good old Auguste. I'll carry on."

After I had been searched, Evelyn and I tried to make a dignified show of marching to the door under the perplexed guidance of Auguste. None of the rest said anything, because nobody knew what to say, but we heard a babble burst out as the door closed behind us.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

AUGUSTE PUSHED OPEN the door of my bedroom, and with an agreeable gesture of the stolen pistol motioned us to enter. The fire had gone to embers, but the white lamps were still burning brightly; and, despite the heavy greenish gloom of the chamber, there might have been worse jails. Evelyn stretched herself in a chair, supple and beaming at a quarter past four in the morning, pouted her full lips, and asked for a cigarette. Auguste sprang forward, whipping a packet of Yellows from his hip-pocket as though he were drawing another pistol; he seemed to have conceived a great admiration for Evelyn — as, in fact, anybody must have.

"Thanks. And now," she said, "that we're all in clink together, do you think we might have a drink?"

"Assuredly, mademoiselle!" he boomed, puffing out his moustache. "All I ask of you both is not to try to escape. I would have to shoot, and I do not wish to do that. Forget the window; you could not get out there at all. As for the drink, Joseph or Louis shall see to it immediately."

"Auguste," Evelyn said sternly, in his own language, "unbend. You are too thorough an artist. You do not have to play the butler now. You are Detective-Sergeant Allain, of the Sûreté. Now tell me, with your hand on your heart: Do you really think that man there is Flamande?"

Auguste unbent. He guffawed, and slapped his thigh with a big hand. Then he gave the question his serious consideration, sighting along the point of his

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mustache as though along a rifle-barrel.

"Ah, that! Frankly, mademoiselle, I do not know. Sometimes I think so, and sometimes I think he is only a mad Englishman. All the same, allow me to say that his friends support him — especially yourself." He beamed on us both, and added in the simple Gallic manner: "It jumps to the eyes that he is your *amant*, of course?"

"If it jumps to the eyes so easily as that," I said, "doubtless certain people have been foolish for not availing themselves of the pressure of public opinion. Is this spy-work, Auguste? Will anything we say be used against us?"

He reflected. "That depends, monsieur. I was instructed to watch you. Of course, if you say nothing . . ." He hesitated. "One thing I might suggest. If you are Flamande, you also might unbend. It is not necessary to pronounce your native language so badly, monsieur."

This was one in the eye. "Which brings up the question," said Evelyn musingly, "do you still pretend you're Flamande, Ken? I shouldn't. With your accent, you'll never be able to do it convincingly."

"All right. Under the heaviest kind of pressure, I admit I'm not Flamande. So I'm going to ask Sergeant Allain some questions. Look here, old man: You will honestly swear you found that brown bag in this room?"

"Certainly! It was there — at the foot of the bed."

(Where I had left the black one, incidentally.)

"You got it out of the back of Miss Cheyne's car, and brought it up here."

"No, I did not bring it up here. Louis or Joseph would have distributed the baggage."

"Well, do you people pay any attention to fingerprints, for instance? Did you find my fingerprints on the bag or that Humane-Killer in the false bottom?"

Auguste laughed outright. "The chief, monsieur, pays little attention to such trifles. He says they are outmoded, and psychologically unimportant. If any fingerprints are ever found anywhere, we can be sure they were never left by the right person. In any case, there *were* no fingerprints at all. Would you expect Flamande to leave any? What a joke! He would have painted his fingers with liquid rubber."

"He would have painted his fingers with liquid rubber in order to take a toothbrush out of his own valise?"

Again Auguste grinned. "If you are not Flamande, you are very innocent.

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There is a very transparent form of liquid rubber which can be put on the tips of the fingers without detection. Flamande would have worn it all the time, when engaged in an operation. He would have left no fingerprints at all." He frowned. "Excuse me, but you must understand I am not permitted to answer questions."

"Now, now, Auguste! Sit down. Smoke a cigarette. Make yourself comfortable and join us in a drink. . . . You might pull that bell-cord there, and see if we can get one."

By his actions it was clear that Auguste was far from convinced of my guilt. After some hesitation he put the pistol in his pocket, pulled the bell-cord, and sat down with a gusty breath of relief.

"You will admit, then," I pursued, "that there might have been a mistake of some sort about the baggage?"

He shrugged. "You must convince the chief, monsieur; not me. Besides, what sort of mistake? Has there been any other mistake?"

"Oh, yes. Do you remember that the attaché-case of the impostor, the man who said he was Gasquet, was mysteriously lost or mislaid? I see you do remember. Has it been found?"

"No. That is true," agreed Auguste. "But that will not make a brown valise turn into a black one, as you say it did, and then change back into a brown again. No, no, no, no! You understand?" He chuckled. "That false Gasquet gave us — I mean the chief — much to worry about, faith! Of course we thought he was Flamande. That was why I was watching his windows, and the chief was watching his door. We intended to see what he meant to do, and then . . . *voilà!*" Auguste closed his fingers. "When he was murdered, that upset the chief. It was necessary to look elsewhere. So, while you were having supper, he ordered me to search the rooms; all except those of Dr. Hébert, whom he had seen before and knew, and of the two Englishmen called 'sir.' "

"D'Andrieu, or Gasquet, was really watching that man's door before the murder? He was watching it from where?"

Auguste's eyes narrowed. "Why . . . I suppose from the middle door of his rooms just at the end of the gallery."

"And by consequence he had a clear view of all the gallery before the lights went off?"

Evelyn turned excitedly to me and forgot French. "I say, Ken, there's at least one thing that's struck me all along as being dashed queer. When he was

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building up his case against you, the one thing Gasquet neglected to bring out at all was the one big thing everybody had been harping on so much before. Who turned off those lights, from the switch in the linen closet? If Gasquet thought you were the murderer, he must have believed you turned off those lights. Did you have an opportunity to do that? I know you didn't, because I was in this room with you — but is there any proof of it?"

"Yes. Fowler definitely stated that he would have seen anybody going to the linen closet if the person came from this end of the gallery. He said nobody did."

"Right. Now think back on it. This evening in walks an impostor who claims he is Gasquet when he's driven into a corner. The real Gasquet, or D'Andrieu, knows he isn't. Naturally, as we should have realized, he'll be watching the chap's door — just as Auguste watched the window. Therefore he had a clear view of the gallery. He must have seen who really did sneak into the linen closet and turn off the lights. . . . Why didn't he say so?"

"He was reserving his bombshell, I should think. No, hold on there!" I said, and felt the business spinning again. "He wouldn't have reserved his bombshell if he meant to accuse me, because I didn't do it. No, by God, on the contrary: that hour or half-hour after the murder was exactly the time when he was puzzled most. . . ."

"Puzzled most?"

"Yes! He tried to make accusations against Fowler, and prove that Fowler was the only one who had an opportunity to sneak into the linen closet ——"

"You mean he really must have seen Fowler do it?"

"That's one possible explanation, of course. But there are objections. Wouldn't he have said, 'Don't try to bluff; I *saw* you go in there!' H.M. says he only accused Fowler because he was upset, puzzled, and firing shots at random. You notice how, if he did think Fowler was guilty, he damned quickly shifted to accuse me. But if he didn't see Fowler sneak in there (and Lord knows he didn't see me) then who in the name of sanity did he see? Under the circumstances, we admit that he did not see Fowler. By consequence, Fowler is telling the truth. Fowler says he saw nobody come from the other end of the gallery. That excludes Miss Cheyne, Mrs. Middleton, Hayward, myself . . . in fact, everybody. We reach the conclusion, as Fowler said to-night: we reach the conclusion, Auguste, that the lights were turned off by your chief himself."

"Ah, *no!*" thundered Auguste, giving a jump in the chair. "That is ridicu-

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lous. Why should the chief have done such an imbecile thing? Ah, no! That is insulting; and besides I am here to watch you, not to talk ——"

Evelyn abruptly sat forward.

"You've all been forgetting something, haven't you? The chief wasn't the only one at the other end of that gallery, where he couldn't be seen. Have you forgotten that Owen Middleton was in the bathroom?"

I refused to believe this, and said so; not only because Middleton was the last person I should have chosen as Flamande, but also because he had backed me up when I was in difficulties.

"Admitting that they're not very good reasons," I said, "still, if he had cut the lights D'Andrieu would have seen him."

"But by his own confession Middleton's just come from India. . . ."

"Yes, and that's another thing. What the devil are all these hints about India, and just exactly what is the unicorn anyway? Ramsden says it's worth half a kingdom and a million pounds. Fine! But what is it? It seems to me I ought to know that. It's coming it strong when you're under arrest for being a master criminal, without any idea of what it is you're supposed to be trying to steal."

She pointed her cigarette.

"Yes, but in just a minute. Ken, it must be Middleton. If it isn't, don't you see we've only got the alternatives of it's being D'Andrieu or an invisible man."

Here Auguste raised his hand.

"Invisible, mademoiselle," he said gustily, "in one sense. That the great chief might not have been able to see him."

"Even though he walked into the linen closet with the lights on?"

"Even then, mademoiselle," agreed Auguste, with a heavy frown. "You understand, there was much work to be done in putting this château in order for our play, especially as it had to be done so quickly. Well, I was in and out of that linen closet a great deal, which my chief was not. And so I noticed the door there. It is not a very obvious door, although there is nothing secret about it. It is a part of the paneling, on the left-hand side as you go in, but much towards the rear. It communicates with the room used by the dead man, the impostor. I did not look to see where it went, but that room is beside the linen closet. You recall, on the right-hand side of the impostor's room, a large curtain? The other side of the door must be there. Yes, faith! But why should I think of it? If what you say is true, it must mean that the false Gasquet

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himself turned out the lights! Yes — and it was only a few seconds afterwards that I myself saw him throwing his valises out of the window. But why should he turn out the lights?"

"If he did," I said, "it would explain D'Andrieu's wild attitude, when he was looking straight down the gallery, and yet saw nobody approach to go into the linen closet. It also means that everybody in the case must go back under suspicion now; everybody!"

"Including yourself, don't forget," Evelyn pointed out. She was frightened now. "If Gasquet hears of this now, all the rest of his evidence will fit beautifully, and you'll be for it. Wh-ew! Sergeant!" She turned on the uncomfortable Auguste a face of such fervent and radiant appeal that Auguste almost bellowed; evidently he sensed what was coming. "Auguste, my old one, you do not intend to tell this to your chief, do you?"

"But, mademoiselle! I ask of you, you do not suggest — no, no, *no!* It is necessary to do my duty. Without doubt, M. Gasquet will be annoyed at my not telling him before, and as it is he will apply a stroke of the boot to my backside. No, no, *no!*"

I tried another course. "Naturally you will have to tell him, Sergeant Allain, but you cannot do it now. Your orders were to remain with us. Let us have a discussion of the matter, without prejudice to us."

"So? I am glad that is understood," rumbled Auguste, with dignity. "Well, monsieur?"

"Let's suppose that you are Inspector Auguste Allain, Chief of the Sûreté — as you may very well become, if you approach this matter with wise counsel. You are in charge of the investigation. Whom would you arrest? You must have some theory. A clever officer like yourself would be certain to have one."

Auguste hesitated, and spoke in a low voice.

"Between ourselves, you understand, I should have no hesitation in putting the chain on the wrists of M. Ernest Hayward."

After a pause he went on, raising his eyebrows gleefully and making mysterious confidential gestures: "That surprises you? Ah! I thought it would.

"But we find stains of mud on the sill of a window in a certain person's room; that of M. Hayward. To me it means that the person who most probably made those stains is M. Hayward himself. I should at least ask him about them, and not neglect it simply because it was the obvious thing to do. And what do we

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find? We find that," said Auguste, raising a significant forefinger, "he admits turning out his lamp a few seconds before he hears a scream. But what does he do then? Does he run out, like the rest of you? No! He hesitates. He is the last to reach the stairs. And what is he doing? He says he is standing in the gallery — although M. Middleton, coming from a room beyond, does not see him there.

"You, monsieur, are accused. And what does one say you have done? One says that, after you have rushed out of M. Hayward's room, you immediately (with the gun under your coat) run down to throw a glance at the corpse. If you had done it, would you not have run immediately to your room to conceal the gun? For you would not have been seen in the dark, and *then* you could have joined the others at the staircase. Well! Who could have run down and concealed the gun in your room? M. Hayward. Who did hesitate before he joined the others? M. Hayward. Eh? Eh? But you, imbecile!" said Auguste violently, making a hideous face and spreading out his shoulders in an involved shrug, "you must cook your own goose by declaring that you possess a black valise which has no false bottom. Ah, bah! You are mad!"

Evelyn and I looked at each other. Her eyes were shining.

"It is still a black valise. Otherwise, my friend," I said, with hearty and humble sincerity, "I raise my hat and salute you. Damn it, why couldn't I have thought of so simple a ——"

"Ah, well," he protested, and my liking and respect for him went up about fifty degrees. "But to business!" He pointed again. "Is there anything else to consider in the Hayward affair?"

"Continue."

"Ask yourselves," resumed the other, who was thoroughly enjoying himself now, "about the impostor who called himself Gasquet and was killed. Was he Flamande? No! Flamande would not have been so imbecile, when he was caught in one imposture, to have said instantly that he was Gasquet. The real Gasquet would have . . ." Again Auguste closed his fist. "Good! But that man, whoever he was, was here for a good purpose. He meant to betray the identity of Flamande. When he spoke to all of betraying Flamande, he did not lie.

"His attaché-case vanishes. And what happens? I search for it. He searches for it. I come upstairs, and what then? I find him coming out of the room of

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M. Hayward. Why has he chosen that room first, and why does he show no more interest himself in searching rooms after he finds that the attaché-case is not there?

"Now I ask one thing only. What is the truth about that damned valise?" He exploded a little. "I am haunted by that damned valise. How could you have taken a toothbrush from a black valise, when I myself know it was brown?"

There was a knock at the door. Auguste, who had been speaking loudly, checked himself with a strangled motion which almost caused him to swallow the cigarette. He sprang up. Covering us sternly with his pistol, he moved over and unlocked the door.

It was Joseph, who peered in suspiciously, and seemed relieved to see the weapon in Auguste's hand.

"What's the matter with you?" he demanded. "I have no time to answer bells. We are putting up that portable bridge ——"

There was only one way to get what I wished to know.

"Shut that, Joseph!" I said, and got up. "You will render every courtesy to Flamande, or by God! on the sacred word of Flamande, which is never broken, I will be out of jail in three days and come to cut your throat. Do you understand?" I only checked myself with an effort from adding, 'Boo!' because he had fallen back with a jump. There were advantages in being branded with that name.

"You can do nothing now," he said, without particular conviction. "What do you want?"

"We want a bottle of whisky, at the expense of the Republic, and smartly. And now a question: You brought the baggage up to this room from the hall below, did you?"

"If you ask about the brown valise, I brought it up."

"And the other valise, Joseph: the black?"

"*Viens*, don't try to talk like an Englishman! You are caught. Yes, I brought up the other safe enough. What of that?"

Auguste swung round towards him. "What's this? You say there were two valises? Two? Two? A brown and a black? Speak up, Brigadier!"

"What is all this? A criminal can have two valises, can't he? I didn't steal his camel of a valise. I am a detective, not a cursed valet. I tell you I brought it up

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here and put it by the bed, and may he stumble on it and break his neck that the guillotine will shave! There."

Auguste roared. "You brought two valises. You mixed nothing up, eh? You are a detective of fine talent, eh, says you? You will tell me next that you have mixed up nothing tonight. For example, you did not lose the attaché-case which belonged to the man who was killed?" His voice vibrated with hollow irony. "You did not do that, eh?"

"Ah, bah, a trifle!" snorted Joseph. "What does it matter now he is dead? He was a fraud anyhow. What is more, I found the attaché-case again. That is, I know where I put it. To return, monsieur, to this matter of gr ——"

"And where is it, Brigadier?" I asked softly.

"In the possession of Dr. Hébert," said Joseph.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

"IF YOU EVER WANT to be an Inspector, Auguste," I said, "haul him in here and shut the door! The biggest clew in the whole case has dropped straight on your head."

Still coolly, Auguste laid hold of Joseph's collar. "M. Joseph," he observed with formal declaration, "Come here, my child, and tell me of this latest piece of stupidity." He drew the man inside and locked the door again. "Tell me: exactly what happened to that attaché-case?"

"Ah, bah," said Joseph, with a snappish gesture, "you talk to me of attaché-cases when we have captured the greatest criminal of the age, and you do not even take the trouble to guard him properly! The chief shall hear of what *I* do? What about ——"

This was a mistake. A red bar showed across Auguste's forehead. He reached out a big hand and pinned Joseph by the shoulder against the door.

"All the same, my friend," he interposed with heavy softness, "we will talk of attaché-cases, if you please. I think this man is an Englishman, and we French are going to show an Englishman what fair play means. You say the attaché-case is in the possession of Dr. Hébert. How and why does it come to be there?"

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Joseph swallowed.

"But it was entirely natural! Think, now, and remember! The baggage was all piled downstairs in the hall, and, when that doctor entered at the first, do you remember that he was carrying a brown attaché-case?"

"And so?" prompted Auguste.

"And so all the baggage was piled in the hall and sorted. I saw a brown case, and naturally I thought, 'That belongs to the doctor,' so I took it up with his valise. Afterwards I did not connect it with any other man's case, when you questioned me about it, though I remembered seeing a brown one. Long afterwards, when the murder was done, I see Dr. Hébert still carrying his case, and I think, 'That's odd, because they all say he has never gone upstairs at all! How did he get his case?' But I remember your questions, and I know there must have been two cases. But what does it matter? The man is dead. . . ."

I girded myself. "Listen, Auguste. It's just a little thing to do, and you've got to do it. Down there in Hébert's room is undoubtedly the evidence that will show us who Flamande is and send him to the guillotine. You have got to go down there and get it. Lock us in here, and leave this fellow on guard with your gun. We won't escape. My God, don't you realize how important it is?"

Auguste drew a wheezing breath, and his hand was shaking. He stepped back, handing Joseph the pistol.

"You will guard them," he said, "or I will smash your face. Understood? If you are afraid, stand outside the door. Here is the key. Lock it on the outside. I have never yet disobeyed an order, but I will disobey one now."

In the next moment he had hauled Joseph outside; the door was shut and the key clicked. I felt my heart bumping my ribs, feeling that Joseph should have brought that whisky first.

"You think there's a chance?" said Evelyn.

"There's just a chance. The question is — whether Flamande got there first. If that attaché-case," I said, staring at the door, "contains what I think it does (and I don't even know what that is) then you're well out of it, old girl. They can't say a word to you. They ——"

I broke off at a curious sound, almost a terrifying sound in that quiet room. She was crying, not in sobs, but with a quiver which was as impalpable as a heat-wave and yet struck me dumb and helpless with a tenderness such as I had never known before. The love I felt for that girl hurt with a physical pain that

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seemed to dissolve the world. Yet all I could do, raging against my own foolery that had got her into this, was simply to rage; to say, 'Take it easy,' or some such fool thing; to put my arm about her fiercely, and to stare at the shadows for some enemy that could be tangibly fought.

"I — I'll be all right in a second," she said between her hands. "It isn't . . . what you think. It's just the horrible ludicrousness of it, don't you see? They've made such fools of all of us; yes, even H.M.; they'll make us . . . Oh, I know they can't prove — I don't think they can — but it's looking like such poor driveling fools . . . If we could only get out of here, somehow, and *show* them. . . ."

I held her more tightly. It is that quiet trembling, scarcely more than a quiver, which seems endless and terrible.

"Don't worry, old girl," I said. "If you really want to get out of here, we will."

"I tell you I'll be all right in a second! I feel a little funny, that's all. I just feel ——"

"It's hotter than blazes in here. You need some air. Come over and we'll open a window."

We knelt on the window-seat, pushing the casements wide open, and breathing the air deeply.

"I must have talked awful rot for a minute," Evelyn said. But she was still trembling. "If you could only understand what I mean. . . ."

This was the part that was hurting like the devil. "Oh, I understand what you mean. There's never been anybody who's ever made such a blasted hash of anything as I have of this. If ——"

"You can't expect *me* to believe that, can you? Shh! Don't talk about it! Listen, Ken: what do we do now?"

"Wait, I suppose, to see what Auguste finds. It's always waiting."

"Do you think he'll come back and tell us?"

"He should, if it's good news."

We both turned round. We could hear Joseph gabbling something outside the door, excitedly, but in a low-pitched voice. A voice seemed to be answering him from the gallery. Not a word was distinguishable from either person. It was the very indefinite muttering of those excited voices which roused us to a wild excitement. Then there were footsteps that indicated Joseph was leaving the door.

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I ran over to the door and wrenched at the knob.

"Auguste!" I yelled. There was no answer. The footsteps still receded. "Joseph! What is it? Did you find ——?"

The footsteps were no longer audible.

"What do you think it is?" Evelyn whispered.

"God knows. It may be more trouble. If he'd found out the right evidence, he might have given us a tip what to expect. . . ."

Ten full minutes ticked past by Evelyn's wrist watch, and that can be a very long time. The château was absolutely still; it might have been deserted.

"Ken, I've just thought of something. Gasquet said that downstairs room was like a whispering gallery, and you could hear anything from the outside. Suppose Flamande could hear up here somewhere in the same way? Suppose he was listening when you and Auguste and Joseph were talking, and he was waiting for Auguste down in Hébert's room? We don't know it was Auguste who called Joseph away from the door. We ——"

There were footsteps, lumbering but quick, coming along the gallery. Heavy hands fumbled at the key. And the person who opened the door a crack was H.M.

"What I'm goin' to say," he told us, peering back over his shoulder, "will have to be said quick. I want no objection, and I want you to do just exactly as I tell you or you'll ruin all of us. You've got to get out of here and cut for it, both of you."

"But what . . . ?"

"Listen to me! They're all at the back; never mind how or why. You just trust me. They've got that collapsible bridge laid down, and you can get across the river. Once you're over, there's a big square clump of willows about twenty feet on the right hand side. In there you'll find a stable with a garage attachment at one side, and the door's open. You'll find a car all fueled and ready. Climb in that car, follow the main drive round to the outside road, and go like hell for Chartres. . . ."

"Yes, but what ——?"

"Listen: how many times have I got to tell you everything will be all right if you do as I say? Trust me, or we're all licked. Here's the key to that car. When you get to Chartres, find the British consulate and stay there till you get word from me. It won't be long. Don't argue, I tell you. Give me two minutes to get downstairs and out of sight, and then down you go."

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The gallery outside, I noticed, was now dark. H.M. gave us a wink and something like a grin of encouragement; then the door closed.

Evelyn was pale. "If H.M. — if we — can only fool 'em somehow!" she said with a kind of blaze, and clenched her hands. "We can rely on him. I don't know what he's doing, but I'll bet now he wins the last trick. They can't stop us now; they *can't!*"

Composedly she went about shutting the window and blowing out the lamps. I kissed her, we both grinned, and then we were out into the gallery.

You made no noise if you walked on the strip of carpet down the middle. There were lights in the lower hall, for we could see the glow shining up from over the staircase. The most difficult part would be the stairs; they were uncarpeted. But they did not creak, and we could move quietly if we took care. I heard Evelyn's quick breathing. Both of us moved back instinctively as we came into the glow at the head of the stairs. There was nobody in the red-carpeted lower hall. We went down the last flight, into the grateful shadow that masked that fretted place of pillars. Nearly out of it now! Ten steps more, and then the door. We were on the carpet now, moving more swiftly. . . .

"Got it!" breathed Evelyn. "We can run once we're out. We ——"

Crashing and thunderous in that quiet, the iron knocker on the front door banged a summons. We stood stock-still, as though the noise were the end of the world. Somebody called out angrily. Then the door was pushed open. And in the doorway, taking off his hat and slapping it against his waterproof, stood the real Harvey Drummond.

The echoes had not died away while we stood looking at each other.

Silence.

The man we had played hob with on the Levai road, the hard-boiled braggart, the one and original Tough Guy who was so free with his language and his manners. His hand stopped in slapping the hat at his waterproof. Across his pudgy, heavy-jowled face, with the little eyes gleaming now, there spread a smile.

"By God," he whispered. "So I've got you at last." His smile grew beautiful, but the little eyes did not change. "I've been waiting all night to come in and see you, Mister Tea-Importer Flamande. We're going to have you in jail so quick that they won't see your dirty snout for dust. Yes, the coppers are here. But before I hand you over to them, I'm going to satisfy myself by beating you to the worst pulp you ever saw outside rotten fruit."

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It wasn't Drummond in himself; it was the last climax to a night of setbacks and misunderstandings and things snatched jeeringly out of reach at the last moment. That was what did it. All the jeers and humiliations for some reason seemed centered in him, and self-respect too. There are times when a bomb explodes inside your head, and the universe splits in hate. I welcomed him like a brother, with a kind of gleeful whoop.

"Will you, now?" I said. "Come on, you bastard, and let's see whether you're as good as you say you are."

In the ordinary course of things I probably couldn't have stood up to him for two minutes. But the man was as crazy-mad as I was, and he forgot everything he must have known. The fool came in wide open, trying to grab for my collar. And, as he plunged, I took a step backwards and gave it to him straight in the mouth.

I saw the blood come from his smashed teeth just before he landed between my eye and cheek-bone. The lights and his face jumped out of focus; there were several of his faces, weaving soundlessly, although his red mouth seemed to shout. Neither of us made any attempt to guard. All I wanted to do was murder him. I saw his fist come in, feeling very little; and banged back with right and then left again straight to that red mark. Something caught me in the pit of the stomach. We were twisting somewhere, as though at his blow both of us had risen in the air; our legs got entangled, and I was punching at a sandbag which kept thumping into my face. . . .

Then he was dancing in front of me; dancing or hopping, and the lights and pillars went round with him. His left went low into my stomach. But his leg must have buckled, for the right came up wild and deafened my ear. I fired inside for his undertucked jaw, and we banged together at close grips against a pillar. What happened then, or how long it lasted afterwards, I am not sure. Was this the great Harvey Drummond, with round swings like a blind man, reeling and staggering and not knowing his own feet? I was still battering a brick wall, but I was hitting it. I was doing the yelling now, even when pain exploded through my head. Round swept the red carpet under our feet again. He lurched over my shoulder, with a face that seemed all eyes and blood. Then he landed one that sagged my knees, screamed triumphantly, ducked back off the carpet — and I got him.

Or almost. Suddenly the hall seemed to be alive with people charging down on me, and Drummond got mixed up with them. There was a confused shout-

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ing. My arms were twisted back behind me, I was yanked backwards, and sat down flat. There was blood in my eyes, but I saw Drummond take little uncertain steps like a drunken man, and go down on his knees. And out of the din rose Fowler's voice:

"Merrivale, you bloody fool, you've got the handcuffs on the wrong man!"

Drummond was bent forward as though he were praying on his knees. He had his hands together, and now, with a witless look on his smashed face, he raised them. And there was the gleam of a chain between, from the handcuffs at which he suddenly began to yank and tear and flap.

And H.M.'s heavy voice spoke. "Oh, no, son," he said. "I haven't got 'em on the wrong man. They're where they belong, as good old Gasquet will tell you . . . on the wrists of Flamande."

CHAPTER NINETEEN

"THEN YOU'RE TELLING US," I said, "that that little 'escape' of ours was planned between you and M. d'Andrieu (excuse me if I stick to the name) just in the belief that Drummond would try to cut us off?"

"Uh-huh. We knew he'd be certain to. You'll hear about it."

"And even that fellow, the one who stopped us on the Levai road, wasn't the real Harvey Drummond after all? He was Flamande all the time? Yes. I thought he wasn't quite such a wonder in an open fight."

"Pray console yourself, Mr. Blake," said D'Andrieu cheerfully. "He may not have been so scientific, but he was about ten times more dangerous. Our great fear was that he might be armed. . . . But you can hear the details presently. For the moment — breakfast."

It was past seven o'clock of a clear morning when jovial sunlight was broadening in warmth across a drenched Orléannois, and sweeping the last dingy shadow from the Château de l'Ile. D'Andrieu had insisted on our breakfasting in state on the lone stone balcony at the rear, overlooking the full sweep of the river. The long cloth had been laid for eleven places, since Evelyn demanded the presence of Auguste Allain. The river glittered far below the balustrade. Under that splendor of sunlight, D'Andrieu at the head of the table glowed affability on us as he had done early last night.

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"I think," he said, "that in the hearing of everybody these various puzzles should be explained. First, in justice to Miss Cheyne and Mr. Blake, as being the accused; and, second (I insist) to demonstrate that Gaston Gasquet is not so pig-headed as at times he seems. It was not, I freely confess, until after four o'clock this morning that I had any doubts. It was five before I was persuaded of the truth. Since my whole reconstruction of the murder appears to have been wrong, I humbly retire. Since we have caught Flamande, who is now under guard, I tell you privately that I do not give one damn whether I was wrong or not. That is logic. The credit, I am willing publicly to admit, belongs to my friend Merrivale ——"

H.M. looked alarmed.

"No!" he roared. "If you're goin' to be self-sacrificin', then be self-sacrificin' enough to do just one thing. Forget I ever had anything to do with this." He looked at Fowler. "This bulletin you're preparing ——?"

"It is agreed," said Fowler, "that Flamande was captured by Gasquet and his faithful henchman Sergeant Allain. That is, on condition you tell us exactly what did happen and how you knew it."

"Uh-huh. All right. In a couple of ways it'll be an imperfect reconstruction, d'ye see, until we can get in touch with Marseilles and verify a couple of things. Also, Flamande himself ain't likely to talk. Anyhow, I'll fill in the gaps with guesswork that I'm willing to bet ain't very far off the truth.

"Gents, this is the queerest case I ever handled. This is the only instance I know when *three* people were got up to look like each other. And, because of that one little point, a perfectly plain series of events got so snarled up that everybody concerned seemed to have bats whirlin' and squeakin' in his belfry.

"We'll begin, not at the actual beginning of the business — I'll return to that — but at the moment when I first got a dim inkling of what might be behind it. That was down in the drawing-room early last night, when in walked a man pretending to be Harvey Drummond; the other impostor, as it were, who had traveled by the plane.

"Knowing what Ken had told me, about what happened on the Levai road, that gave me an awful jolt. Two Drummonds, two people within an hour who both pretended to be the same man! (We know now they were both fakes, but all I had then was a reelin' sensation in the head.) Well, I looked at this feller hard; and I could take my oath he wasn't Harvey Drummond. He was playing a part; the swagger was wrong; the whole attitude and bluff was

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that of a highly intellectual feller aping Drummond's mannerisms ——"

"I noticed it," I said.

"Uh-huh. Well, if he wasn't Drummond, who was he? For the first few seconds, the thing was to pretend to believe him and try to find out his game. Then I got the first nebulous, uncertain hint. Ken was tellin' about meetin' this fellow back on the road . . . and, for an impostor who is likely to be shown up at any minute, he took the whole business very queerly. When he heard about that man back on the road, he didn't show any of the tricks of emotions you'd expect even in a strong-bluffing actor who believes he can get away with his imposture. He was only *excited and interested;* vitally interested. Think back. He kept lookin' at Ken in a funny kind of eager way, and he said, 'I'd like to have a bit of a talk with you this evening. You say somebody back there pretended to be me?' Ken answered, 'Not exactly. He didn't give his name.' Then this feller couldn't quite keep his excitement down. He asked, 'Where is he now?' just a little too sharply. It didn't sound to me like the tone of a man who's afraid he'll be shown up. It really sounded as though he were anxious to meet this other chap, but was very much afraid he wouldn't. That intrigued the old man considerably. I broke in and made it plain that the other chap would be headin' straight for here to make trouble, and ought to be along soon. Far from disconcertin' him, it had just the opposite effect. While I was still puzzlin' and studyin', in broke our good host with a request that the tangle should be straightened out. Ken was put into a corner by some quick questions, and asked to produce the fountain-pen he'd borrowed from the supposedly real Drummond back there.

"Ken handed the fountain-pen to this chap. What happened? The minute he saw it, he went a funny color and his fingers were shaking. Does that look like guilt? He'd been cool enough before, even when we palpably didn't believe him. It might have been guilt at the sight of that fountain-pen, but I've had occasion to point out before that people in real life don't go pale and scream when they're faced with damaging evidence. That's the time when they're fightin' hardest and coolest. When they do go pale is when they see something that confirms a fear they've had. Why did the feller act like that when he saw the pen?

"The whole crux of the matter lay in this: Was his imposture a cloak for crooked work? Or was it an innocent one done for a good purpose? I was just sittin' and thinkin', and it struck me that this looked like an innocent impos-

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ture. If it was innocent, back still came echoin' the question: who the devil is this chap? Burn me, I thought, he looks enough like Harvey Drummond to be his broth . . .

"*Brother!* Wow! Gents, I got an awful turn just by thinkin' of that figure of speech. Brother? Was there anything in it? Was it possible in some wild way that the man there was really *Gilbert* Drummond, who was supposed to have been murdered in Marseilles? (Remember, I'm still dealin' with cloudy, unproved guesses.) I'd never met the real Gilbert Drummond. Was it theoretically possible that with the addition of a mustache (this feller's toothbrush was an obvious fake), and a padded suit, that Gilbert could pass for Harvey? If so, where was the real Harvey? Also, who was the man who was murdered in Marseilles as Gilbert Drummond?

"Still we were on debatable, not to say mythical, ground. There was the strong probability that I was wool-gatherin' and that the man before us might be Flamande. So I applied two tests. Test number one: I accused him of bein' Gasquet, and he admitted it."

Middleton pinched at his under-lip. "Thereby," he said, "convincing all the suspicious-minded that he was really Flamande."

"On the contrary, son. It was the one thing which convinced me he couldn't possibly be Flamande, or any kind of crook. Now, Flamande knows Gasquet is goin' to be there. Maybe Flamande even has a ghost of an idea where to look for Gasquet; in any event, he knows he's there. So if *he* sings out and pretends to be Gasquet, his goose is burnt to hell. The game's up in that second. You can take this much for granted: any crook playing a part — I mean his first part; that of Harvey Drummond — is goin' to stick to that part in spite of anything. He's not goin' to change characters in mid-act. He's not goin' to admit bein' anybody else, especially as people are more doubtful of Ken's information than they are of his. . . . Consequently, then, why does this man rap right out, with a queer kind of ironical grin on his face (as though he's enjoyin' some kind of joke) and say, 'I am Gasquet'?

"But why pretend to be Gasquet, when he could be unmasked if the real Gasquet showed up? And the answer that occurred to me was this: he didn't mind bein' unmasked. It tickled some satiric nerve in him to say that — because he really was on an avengin' errand, and he really did know the identity of Flamande. You remember, that wasn't fakin'. He was very devilish

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positive that he knew Flamande. How'd he come to be so sure? Did he know it all along, or was it just possible that some inkling had come to him when he heard Ken's story and saw that fountain-pen? The incident of the fountain-pen was becoming very suggestive, and what happened on top of it? We said to him, 'If you're Gasquet, show us Flamande.' And what swelled him out in a kind o' pleased fury was triumph. His answer was, 'Yes, I will show you Flamande presently, but not at this moment.' Why not then and there, if the cat was out of the bag? — why give the slippery Flamande any chance to escape? Another thing he said was also suggestive, 'My men will be here presently, and they will have a prisoner to take back to Paris.' All that seemed to depend on his men arriving; on somebody arriving there, anyway. Who? They weren't his men, he wasn't Gasquet, he had no authority . . . was it possible that he was *waiting* for the other Drummond to show up at the château, as we said he would, before the trap could be sprung? 'Suppose,' I said to myself, 'just as a floating hypothesis, suppose this feller is Gilbert Drummond, and that it was Harvey who was murdered in Marseilles. Suppose Gilbert is takin' Harvey's place, to find and trap the murderer . . . since the murderer himself has killed Harvey and stolen his papers with the idea of playin' the part of the same man?'

"But so far it was guesswork, and I had to wait.

"Now you'll understand why I didn't think the feller was in any danger. I thought the murderer, Flamande, hadn't yet arrived in the place. He's been in this house secretly, all along, but we didn't know it. Gilbert (we'll say that to keep the names straight) is waitin' for the other to arrive in his 'Drummond' rôle. Then, d'ye see, he's got upstairs the papers to prove who he is, that Harvey is dead, and that Flamande is guilty. But the big mistake was this: *Gilbert didn't know the causeway was down, and when the real Flamande sneaked into this house he didn't know it was later to be knocked down either.*

"Still, this is gettin' ahead of my story. I don't know all this yet; I'm just sittin' and thinkin'. For, shortly afterwards, we find the feller murdered. My God, that turned my whole universe upside down! I thought, 'Son,' I thought, 'you were wool-gatherin' again; your guess had nothing to support it. You were wrong, because the causeway is busted down and nobody could get in here. Wash out your old idea.'

"I was so mad that I tripped and stumbled all over myself, mentally, until

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I could get a grip again. That was why I was so wild when that murder occurred, and immediately afterwards a neat little jeerin' letter was chucked at us in the dark.

"Then I started to shift and arrange the pieces again. The best way to do that is to get a time-sequence of everything clear in our heads. What happened in the entire course of events immediately after the alleged 'Gasquet' (whoever he was) went upstairs? You remember, he went upstairs some minutes ahead of all the rest of you. And in the meantime? He walked out into the hall, spoke to Auguste — speakin' English all the time, as I found out — and asked where his luggage had been put. Auguste took him up to his room. There he saw two valises, and also saw that a brief-case was missin'. (We know now that through a mistake that brief-case had been put in Hébert's room, but he didn't know it.) Well, he sent Auguste down a-flyin' to look for it. For a little space, while Auguste is down talkin' and lookin' for the case, nobody sees this feller. Then Auguste comes upstairs . . . and sees him comin' out of Hayward's room.

"Follow that? We're not quarrelin' with anything; we're simply listing the information given us. Right! Down goes Auguste again while this feller goes to his room, and the rest of you come upstairs to your own rooms. Auguste goes to see whether the case might have been left in the plane, but in the meantime Joseph and Louis have already dislodged the prepared causeway. Auguste goes up to the chap's room — and incidentally tells him that the bridge is down, at which this chap seems furious. Then Auguste goes down to D'Andrieu's rooms, and watches the back windows of the alleged 'Gasquet's' room while D'Andrieu watches the door. Correct?"

"Correct," agreed D'Andrieu. "Where, I may mention, I saw nobody go into the linen closet. And it upset matters a great deal."

"Sure. But to our evidence: You, Fowler, watching across the hall, *you* didn't see anybody sneak into the linen-closet either. What was seen, in point o' fact, by anybody? Auguste sees this very lummy 'Gasquet' engaged in throwin' his luggage out of the window.

"Boys, shinin' through all the lunacy that's enshrouded this case, that little bit alone would have been enough to unhinge anybody's mind, if you conceived of an innocent man doin' such a thing. For a minute I was up in the air. He threw his luggage out of the window! — why? Well, Auguste, who is

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watchin', hears him say, 'Stolen!' in tragic accents. Which made it rummier. He's lost something; he finds it ain't in his bags or that the bags belong to somebody else. Put any explanation on it you like . . . still the idea of a man in such a temper at a loss that he up and fires all his clothes out of the window is beyond belief. That is, unless ——

"But softly comes whispering the quiet fact: 'This feller who says he's Gasquet, and the man who held up Ken and Evelyn back on the road, look almost exactly alike.'

"It hit me like a hammer. 'Burn me,' I thought, 'again just for a hypothesis, let's.suppose that my first theory was correct after all.' Let's suppose that the man back on the road was Flamande. Suppose he's followed Ken here, he's found out what's goin' on, he knows the false 'Gasquet' is Gilbert Drummond come to expose him — well, we can't build up motives yet, but let's just suppose he's in the house?

"Suppose that the person in that room, the one throwing valises out of the window, is Flamande. Suppose he has taken the place of the other chap? *Then* the disposal of the bags becomes blazin'ly clear. No things labeled 'Gilbert Drummond' can be hanging about. But, as he goes to fire them out into the river, he sees Auguste watching from another window. So he has to flash out quick with some excuse for eccentric behavior; he cries, 'Stolen, stolen!' — the only time, by the way, when he was heard to speak French — to cover up what he's doin'.

"Is there any support for this hypothesis? And then it occurred to me: Fowler's portable typewriter. Now, there's been a great to-do and controversy about that typewriter. The trouble all revolved about the question of who had an opportunity to pinch it unobserved? If you'll look at plain evidence, you will hear the shoutin' answer: The man who came upstairs ahead of all the rest of you, and was the only one to be upstairs alone with all the luggage."

"Unfortunately true," said D'Andrieu. "Proceed."

"More and more it grew on me that a substitution had been effected. One man — the alleged Gasquet whom we've determined to be an Englishman who knows the identity of Flamande — goes upstairs. Fifteen minutes later he's another man. When was the substitution effected? Let's see now!

"He was alone upstairs while Auguste went down to look for his brief-case. We've got to assume that it was the real and original feller who sent Auguste

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after it, since Auguste had been with him ever since he left us in the drawing-room downstairs. . . . When Auguste comes upstairs again, what does he find? He finds the feller just comin' out of Hayward's room.

"Hullo! This is one to puzzle about. Whether he's still the original feller or whether he's a substitute, what's he doin' in Hayward's room, hey? I'm stickin' with my original theory that he was out to incriminate a man he thought hadn't yet arrived at the château. Why Hayward's room? What did we find out about Hayward's room? There's nothin' there, we found later, except some mud-stains on the window sill where somebody had climbed in. . . .

"Got it! Suppose he had climbed in just then? Why? That would have meant he was down on the flat roof. Why? The cloudy picture started to take form.

"Flamande is in this house. While the servants (excuse me! detectives) are at work cuttin' off that bridge, he's been outside the drawing-room and he's overheard all the last part of our conversation — the metamorphosis of 'Gasquet' from 'Drummond' — by reason of the whisperin' gallery acoustics of the place. He knows he's dished, without a chance to come to the house in the rôle of the real Harvey Drummond *as he had originally intended* — unless he can silence that feller before talkin' is done. As our party in the drawin' room breaks up, he sneaks up ahead. I rather suspect he was hidin' in the window-embrasure behind that tapestry when Auguste and his Nemesis went upstairs. Right!

"Now, we'll have to supply a theory here. My own guess is this. Nemesis, having sent Auguste down after the brief-case, is horribly worried. All the evidence that will prove him to be really Gilbert Drummond is in that mislaid brief-case. If he can't find the brief-case; if it's been lost or pinched; he's in a devil of a mess. He gets impatient to see what Auguste is doing. He starts downstairs. Auguste is at the back of the house . . . all the rest of us are in the drawing-room . . . and, either by accident or design, Flamande steps out from behind the tapestry and comes face to face with Gilbert Drummond.

"Flamande had to be fast and silent. I think he stunned his Nemesis with the butt of that Humane-Killer; he dragged him behind the tapestry, put the captive-bolt to his head, and pulled the trigger.

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"With his enemy disposed of, his course is clear. He'll leave the body where it is, hidden behind the tapestry. He'll sneak up quickly, and destroy any damning evidence he may find in Gilbert's room. If anybody sees him, it won't matter a tinker's curse *unless it's either Evelyn or Ken, who have had a good look at the original* back on the road. Anybody who sees him will naturally suppose he's the other feller still alive. After he's destroyed any evidence, he'll sneak out of the house again. After a little while, he'll appear roaring as the real Harvey Drummond, who was attacked and robbed on the road . . . triple-safe, because Ken has practically admitted before everybody that he was the real Drummond! He'll be the injured victim, planted there in the château and ready to rob Ramsden. Nobody in the world will ever suspect him of any murder, because he wasn't in the house, and his identity has been even tacitly vouched for by the very man he's just killed.

"So he kills Gilbert behind the tapestry . . . and just then there are footsteps on the stairs! It's Auguste comin' up, and he's got to work damn fast. It's goin' to look very rummy if he steps out on the landing now, with some casual word about admirin' the tapestry from the inside. That may make whoever is comin' upstairs a bit suspicious. Out he goes through the window, up the buttress, selects Hayward's room at random, and is through the window and out . . . in time to meet Auguste as he leaves the room."

"You're saying," said Middleton, "that all the time this Gilbert Drummond's body was lying behind the tapestry?"

"Uh-huh. And, if you'll use your brains a few seconds more, you'll see the proof of it," said H.M.

CHAPTER TWENTY

"IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND the position he was in," pursued H.M., "let's look at the case from the beginning and see just what Flamande had intended to do.

"Flamande was at Marseilles. His first scheme was plain. He was really goin' to be aboard that plane. And his character was goin' to be Harvey Drummond. We don't know how he learned the identity of the two British agents; with all

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due deference to you, friend Gasquet, I got a strong suspicion of a leak in the police department. Or you can take a more charitable explanation and say that he didn't know Drummond was a secret agent; he only saw him at a hotel in Marseilles, noted their resemblance, learned that Drummond had booked a seat in the plane on which Flamande intended to travel, and decided to kill him and impersonate him. Whether or not he knew Drummond was a British agent, he decided on the rest of the course. . . ."

"We will take that charitable explanation, if you please," said D'Andrieu firmly. "The papers in Gilbert Drummond's brief-case, and the statement he drew up in case anything should happen to him. . . ."

"Uh-huh. There we're on facts. The statement we found early this mornin', when we found the brief-case in Hébert's room, makes the murder at Marseilles clear.

"Harvey Drummond, like the Cheyne wench here, got his instructions several days ago. The 'sealed orders' business made him mad. He wanted to know what was goin' on. He was instructed to meet her at Lemoine's on the evening of the fifth — and proceed to this inn outside Orléans where the 'plant' was originally intended to take place. Correct?"

"Yes," said our host. "It was changed on my meeting my good friend D'Andrieu."

"Now then, accordin' to Gilbert's statement, Harvey couldn't rest without knowin' what was goin' on. He knew part of his business was to guard Ramsden, and he knew Ramsden was to be at Marseilles on the third and fourth of May. So Harvey gets the idea of tellin' his bosses to go roll their hoops, if they won't tell him anything more, and sneak down to see what's goin' on in Marseilles.

"In Marseilles he runs into Gilbert, who's on a holiday. They've put up at different hotels, because neither knows the other is there. He tells Gilbert what's goin' on; but, though he snoops about all durin' the fourth, he can't get wind of what's up . . . until somebody prints an indiscreet guess in one newspaper about the unicorn. . . ."

"Meaning me," said Fowler. "That's why I was in Marseilles at all, and why I was trailing you, Sir George. You see, I admitted it; so I wasn't under false colors."

"Meaning you. Yes, yes, Ken, we'll come to the unicorn in a minute. Well, Drummond begins to guess, and he's even more determined to stick close to

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Ramsden (unobserved), and act as a real guard. Hang the instructions, says the swaggerin' Harvey! His brother Gilbert, who's goin' back to London, has already booked a seat on the evening plane. So Harvey does the same.

"Meantime, Flamande is ready to snaffle Harvey, kill him, and take his place. Only, d'ye see, Flamande knows nothin' about brother Gilbert! — maybe he's never even heard of brother Gilbert.

"And then came the mix-up that threw the whole case out of gear. When (says Gilbert) Harvey was attacked and murdered in that park, something happened that'd be beyond our ken to guess or deduce unless we knew. Harvey had come roaring down to Marseilles without any luggage to speak of; he'd borrowed and was wearin' a suit of Gilbert's clothes, with tailor's label and all inside.

"Flamande, on the evenin' of the fourth, waylays him, probably tells him gleefully exactly what he's goin' to do; and then, when Drummond shows fight, he lets him have it with that Humane-Killer. He strips the body of everything belongin' to Harvey. Nothing (he thinks) is there to identify the body. He finds Drummond's papers, identifications, service-card . . . and even instructions. A grand haul, maybe an unexpected haul.

"Now, from what we know, try to reconstruct Flamande's thoughts. Here's a British agent with instructions to guard what Flamande is goin' after. But what the devil's this? Here are instructions tellin' Drummond to be in Paris; to meet the other agent, Evelyn Cheyne, on the terrace at Lemoine's at eight-thirty on Friday evening; to proceed thence to an inn, etc. — I don't need to repeat it — to which Sir George Ramsden will come. 'Burn me,' thinks Flamande, 'what's all this? Does it mean a trick or a plot? What's the game? Why is Ramsden supposed to go there when so far as I know he's goin' direct to Paris? Son, be careful!'

"And he must have got an even worse jolt when he opened his newspaper next morning and saw that the dead man had been identified, by marks in his clothing, as being *Gilbert* Drummond. Good God, gents, has he killed the wrong man? Who is Gilbert Drummond? Harvey is mentioned as his brother. Two brothers. . . . Well, the name of the chap's hotel is given in the account. Flamande can 'phone to the hotel and find all about Gilbert. A worse thought: Is it possible that Gilbert is travelin' to Paris by the same plane? If so, Flamande is done in the eye. He's sunk. He can't put across his imposture on the

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brother of the dead man. But which was killed? — Harvey or Gilbert? Evidently Harvey, in a different suit. He learns at last by a phone-call that both brothers have booked seats on that plane. Either way, you see, he's done for. He can't travel by that plane, because he's got to be Harvey Drummond or nobody.

"Naturally, if Gilbert learns about the death, he'll go immediately to the authorities and say, 'Here, I'm alive, boys! — that's my brother.' He won't travel by that plane, if he learns about it; yet, still, Flamande is sunk. The news will get round, and if a dead man walks coolly on that plane when the report has gone out, his game will be queered before even the plane leaves Marseilles. Well, what's he goin' to do?

"He's still got one chance left. There's an earlier plane flying from Marseilles to Paris that day . . . it's even mentioned in the reports . . . and if he hops it he can get to Paris by afternoon. His chance is this: he can still follow the instructions given to Harvey Drummond, and be at Lemoine's at eight-thirty to meet the other agent. Of course he's got to chance it that the two agents ain't well known to each other; but it's his only way out. He knows they're goin' to see Ramsden sooner or later. If not at this end, then the other end; and Flamande smells hanky-panky somewhere. . . .

"Meantime, what's happened to Gilbert, the real Gilbert? We don't have to think that out; we know it from the statement. He was pasted in the eye also by the announcement that he was supposed to be dead — but, since he's far from bein' the biggest fool in London, he realizes what must have happened. Harvey was waylaid and killed by the man who threatened in the same issue of the paper to be aboard the plane; there's goin' to be trouble of some kind on that plane. Evidently the murderer knows nothin' about brother Gilbert at all. Well, what can Gilbert do? There are two courses. He can go to the police, set right the mistake, and announce who he is. All very well; but, while he's bein' hung up in the investigation and row before he can prove who he actually is, the plane will hop away without him, and the murderer's plan — whatever it is — will go through accordin' to schedule. Suppose he lies low, assumes the identity of Harvey, and gets a neat knockout punch at the murderer of his brother? He can't let the police into his own scheme, or there'll be delay that may wreck the whole business, but a trick like that would have one great advantage. Suppose the murderer is goin' to assume the identity of Harvey Drummond? Two

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Harvey Drummonds turn up at the airpost. 'Gentlemen, gentlemen, what's this?' say the officials. 'It's an imposture,' says Gilbert; 'and let's just stop here until we can prove it is, while you keep both of us under guard.' Anyhow, Gilbert did it. He cleaned out all his possessions except his own Gilbert-Drummond passport, which he left behind to make it seem that he was really dead, and which the hotel people found. And he goes.

"By the way," said H.M., grunting, "you people should 'a' spotted a bit of it. Didn't the letter from Gasquet to Gasquet, the one our friend here wrote to himself, give a list of passengers; and didn't it say that the 'MM,' or the Messieurs Drummond had booked seats in that plane? Two Drummonds again, Gilbert and Harvey. What happened to the other; and how'd it come that Harvey didn't know anything about his brother's death, or appear to know anything?

"But turn our camera round now, and look at what Flamande is doin'. So far he's been playin' in blindin' awful luck; and more bad luck swings up and gets him. Flamande, playing Harvey Drummond, has boldly gone to a *commissariat* of police in Paris. He's presented his credentials, just to make sure of a line of defense, he's borrowed the uniform of an *agent*, and he's waitin' for what will happen at Lemoine's at eight-thirty. Well, up walks Evelyn at the appointed time. She goes over to Ken, makin' the original mistake (God help her if she'd chosen the other feller, though!) and repeats the signal-verse about the lion and the unicorn. Then Flamande's hair blinkin' well does rise! What's this? A new scheme? New agents, with the plans all changed? He don't dare butt in right there, because he has to feel his way. What are they up to? Naturally he's got to assume the plan has been altered. Now he may be out of it. What's to be done? Well, he's got the coöperation of the police. Suppose he follows the two agents wherever they go; he stops 'em all nice and legal, finds out where they're goin', who they are, and what the game is. Then he launches a charge at them, and has them hauled off to clink *for the night* despite any protestations they make. He can sneak off and be at whatever rendezvous has been made, as the real secret agent, and he needs only a few hours to work before he vanishes.

"You know what did happen. He was done in the eye, and the birds flew away. He was wild. But he wasn't goin' to be beaten. They'd pinched the certificate which he had pinched to begin with. And he was goin' after 'em if he had to walk. I think he sent the two now-useless coppers in the other direction,

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and started out. Good old careful Flamande! He was carrying his own brown bag, with the useful Humane-Killer in the false bottom, in case it became necessary to use it again. . . . But he got over the rise of a hill, and what did he see; hey? A plane comin' down, and lots of rummy things that suddenly tied together in his mind.

"It was a plant . . . he knew that now. He himself was goin' to get into that house. Question: was Gilbert Drummond aboard that plane? If he was . . . well, Flamande would have to get into the house secretly, for he couldn't pretend to be Harvey in front of Gilbert. Up comes Flamande close to see, and on the road he almost runs into two stalled and bogged cars, both of which he's seen before. The people have left 'em — of course, they're with the others. Flamande shoves his brown bag into the rear of one of the cars, to get rid of it while he creeps up and has a look. Now think back. Three people stayed behind monkeyin' with the plane, and pokin' about . . . As it happened, they were Hébert, Fowler and Drummond: Gilbert Drummond. Flamande gets close in the dark, and undoubtedly hears him addressed. Not only that, but the plane was lit up. Flamande must have had his stomach turn upside down to see a man who looks almost like himself.

"What is it? He's sure Harvey is dead . . . what's the infernal twisted trick? But the beauty of the business occurs to him. *Now* he can walk boldly into the house and hide himself until the proper time. He doesn't have to sneak at all; why? Because he looks exactly like the other chap. If anybody sees him, it won't matter so long as they're not seen together. He walks in and gets himself hid. Later the other man comes in . . . who's to know that, in the general confusion and rushin' about of servants, he didn't go out and come in again? Down stairs, he had any of those unoccupied rooms to conceal himself in until he had a chance to strike.

"You know what did happen. Gilbert Drummond was caught out in a lie, and pretended he was Gasquet. Flamande must have sung for joy. His enemy is delivered to him. If he can kill Gilbert — well, his identity has been established as that of Harvey Drummond. He can walk into the house openly afterwards, pretendin' he's just arrived, and do as he likes.

"I told you what he did do. He killed Gilbert and left the body behind the tapestry. All he has to do now is destroy any evidence Gilbert may have, get out of the house, and reappear."

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"But then . . ." said Hayward. "Lord, I see it! Of course. Just as he's gone back up to Gilbert's room and is preparing to fire the suitcases out of the window . . ."

"Uh-huh. You got it. He receives the news that the causeway is down and he's trapped in the house."

There was a pause. H.M. nodded, staring at his fingers.

"D'ye wonder he was wild, hey?" he inquired rather admiringly. "The whole scheme was based on his gettin' out of the house and comin' back in again. Now he's done for, because he can't pretend he did come from the outside.

"Worse! There's that body behind the tapestry. Any minute they'll likely discover it. Any minute somebody is likely to come up and inquire why he doesn't come down to put his evidence before Ramsden and me. He can't delay. And he can't try to brazen out the part now, because — while he was a passable imitation from a distance of the chap we saw downstairs — he can't carry it off for all evening, especially in front of Evelyn and Ken. He's risked the whole business on one throw. And he's lost.

"Only one thing to do: hide. Hide, before somebody finds both himself up in this room and the body behind the tapestry. If he can hide until he finds a way off the island, they'll be certain to think the business was done by some person in the house.

"You see, he's already typed his note which he was going to leave in some conspicuous place to help the illusion. Is there a way out of his room, not along the gallery? There isn't. He goes a-scoutin', and finds only a little door leadin' into the linen closet. Not a bad idea. He shoves the typewriter in there, and looks round. Light-switch! For the gallery lights, undoubtedly. Maybe it cuts off the downstairs lights as well. If he can put out all the lights, and creep down to one of those downstairs rooms . . . good!

"First move: get rid of all evidence. He glances out the window, and sees electric lights shinin' on him from Auguste's window not very many yards away. In he goes to the linen closet, cuts the switch, and hurries to chuck out the luggage . . . but he's seen! Auguste is there. He mutters something about, 'Stolen!' and then he's got to act. Now he's afraid that when they find the body downstairs they'll realize there was a double — the murderer — seen in the house after the man was dead.

"It was Flamande's tightest corner. He has kept an imposin'-lookin' letter-

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file, without anything important inside it but givin' a businesslike look if he's seen. He takes his nerve in both hands, opens the door to the gallery, and looks out. The downstairs lights are still on. How the devil can he get across and downstairs without bein' seen. Somebody — me — is comin' across the lower hall. He suddenly realizes, with bigger panic than any yet, that a door is open just across from him. Fowler is there; Fowler has seen him . . . Good God, there's somebody else coming too! It's Madame Elsa, but Flamande thinks it's Evelyn. They both wear white; they're both dark-haired; and they're both constructed on the same general curved principle. Now he's trapped, with people on every side.

"But in that extremity, friends, he acted like Flamande. He did the only thing he could have done to get out of the scrape. If he's stopped now, and later the body is discovered . . .

"He could make the murder take place then and there! It would save him. You know what he did, almost under the eyes of witnesses. He went to the head of the stairs. He knew exactly where the dead body was lying, just inside the tapestry. It would be touch-and-go; it would be a miracle to bring it off; but he had a chance, and it meant all the difference. He screamed, clapped his hands to his head, and threw himself down. He'd seen before that the floor of the landing is invisible from above, except to anybody looking straight down. He chucked himself down, the letter-file in his own pocket. (Didn't it occur to you it must have been, since he put both hands to his face?) The business took just two seconds. He rolled across under the tapestry, and at the same time rolled the dead body out with his shoulder, and sent it toppling down the stairs.

"Got it? One man tumbled down the first flight. Another, a dummy dead man, completed the descent. Once behind the tapestry, he went through the rest of the performance. Out, and up through Hayward's window. He had plenty of time; he could wait until everybody got downstairs before he came out into the dark gallery above.

"Next question: where to hide up here?"

"Stop a bit!" interposed Ramsden. "You were talking about this Humane-Killer. The last time we heard of it, it was in the false bottom of a brown bag which he had put out of sight in the rear of a car out in the road . . ."

"Sure. And which was brought in by Auguste with the rest of the baggage, and later taken upstairs by Joseph. Y'see, they simply supposed it belonged to

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Ken. Well, it was in the lower hall. Flamande, I think, took the gun out of it for future use as soon as he came into the house. Because of those pillars out there, d'ye see, a man could hide in that hallway even when there were other people in it. You noticed the thick shadows and the opportunities for concealment given by the pillars? Well, he got the gun, but he couldn't walk about with the bag. So he had to leave it there and mark to which room it was taken.

"It was taken to Ken's, and that gave Flamande his idea. When he'd finished his murder, and in the interval when Auguste went downstairs a second time just before you people came up (he didn't know then that the bridge was down) he pinched Fowler's typewriter. Also, he went into Ken's room; put the Humane-Killer back into the false bottom of the bag, and hid the bag there . . . probably behind one of those thick hangings. Ken hadn't seen it yet, and didn't know anything about it.

"His original plan, I'll lay you a tanner, was simply to let somebody else find the bag hidden there; he could be pretty sure there'd be a search. There was nothing in it to incriminate him, and everybody thought it belonged to Ken. Oh, the whole thing was devilish logical, and it was inevitable. He hated Ken about twenty degrees worse than poison for makin' a fool of him back on the road. Ken was to be the victim. Ken was goin' to smart for this; Ken was goin' to be accused, very coolly and carefully. For, when Flamande turned up here as the outraged and robbed Harvey Drummond, *he* was goin' to find the Humane-Killer in the false bottom even if nobody else did. He was goin' to have Ken on toast.

"Well, after fakin' his murder, tossin' the corpse downstairs, and crawlin' back up into the house again, where can he hide? Only one place, until he can get downstairs: in his own room! Does that sound mad? No, because it had a door (not a secret door, but not very obvious) communicatin' with the linen closet. If we come into his room, he slips into the linen closet. If we come into the linen closet, back he goes to the hangings in his own room. (Good thing, those hangings in the bedrooms! This house may not have secret passages, but it's admirable for hidin' nearly anywhere.) Besides, we couldn't surprise him; because there's only oil lamps in the rooms, and he can be out of sight before a light is struck.

"We came upstairs to reconstruct the crime . . . and again my small wager is laid that he was in the linen closet, with the door to his room open, at the

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very time Gasquet and Ken and I were in there gropin' after the light-switch. And then Flamande left his note . . . why? Because, in the faint glow outside, he could see Ken silhouetted as he came in, and heard him speak to me. If he left that note there, there'd be apparently only three people who could 'a' dropped it. But he made a mistake, gents. He *threw* the note . . . or else I wouldn't have seen the white flicker in the air. It proved it came from the back of the linen closet, where there wasn't anybody and couldn't 'a' been anybody unless it was someone concealed.

"Of course you can guess about the brown valise now. Flamande had plenty of time to improve his scheme when we were downstairs just before supper. He was goin' to sweeten his evidence against Ken. So down he goes to Ken's room, takes his black bag, empties it of belongings, and does his usual trick of gettin' rid of it through the window. He fills the brown bag with Ken's stuff, leaves the gun in the false bottom; and, since Auguste will swear to findin' the bag in Ken's car and Joseph to bringin' it up, who's to prove it doesn't belong to Ken? And there it is, flat in the middle of the floor for inspection.

"The plot succeeded pretty well. Flamande was listenin' and gloatin'. He saw every move we made, burn him! And there I was, feelin' sure as my soul that he was in the house and almost within reach, yet still I was helpless because at that time friend Gasquet was grimly set on opposin' anything I suggested. I waited my chance — and made him doubtful only when Evelyn and I lied up-hill-down-dale about that attack in the road. . . ."

"We need not, I think, go into that," observed D'Andrieu amiably.

"But my spirits hit bottom when I heard you people had a bridge ready to throw across the yawnin' chasm, and were goin' to whisk away Evelyn and Ken while Flamande rubbed his hands. It was Flamande's cue to walk out of the house . . . especially since he'd heard Ramsden wasn't carryin' the unicorn, and he had no excuse now to stay. The minutes were tickin' on, and no chance of gettin' him. Well, after those two had been put upstairs in clink, I took friend Gasquet aside for a talk where nobody could hear. I'm happy to say that good old Gasquet's native good sense . . ."

D'Andrieu coughed.

"I began to waver; shall we leave it at that?" he said. "What he means, my friends, is at the crucial point who should enter but Sergeant Allain with the brief-case which had been lying *perdu* in Dr. Hébert's room. It contained proof . . ."

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"Finally, when friend Gasquet and I were sure, and he'd agreed with me that Flamande was loose in the house, it was almost too late. If we banged out with a search through the house, sendin' beaters through the brush and showing we had tumbled to the whole scheme, it's about an even chance he'd have slipped us even then. The bridge was down; the river was peaceful enough to swim, and we didn't like the risk of his wrigglin' through. As it was, he firmly thought he could walk into the house any time he liked in the rôle of Harvey Drummond, and we'd believe him.

"But we did feel sure that, if I cooked up a plan for Ken and the gal to escape, he couldn't resist stoppin' 'em and walkin' straight into our hands. It was a gamble on Flamande's character. He could have got out of it . . . if he hadn't been so vindictive-set on sendin' those people to Paris in handcuffs that he couldn't endure the idea of their havin' a fightin' chance to get away. Nice feller, Flamande. Thoroughly pleasant."

"Just one little thing," I said. "You might explain about the unicorn. I've been asked what I know about unicorns, and how they are connected with India, but nobody has yet . . ."

Ramsden chuckled.

"No harm in speaking, I suppose, since we've caught Flamande," he grunted. "A certain mine at Partial in India was known as the Unicorn mine . . . know where Partial is?"

"Got it!" cried Evelyn. "I thought so. It's near Golconda, isn't it?"

"Golconda!" I yelped. "You don't mean the diamond-mines? Hang it, they've been deserted and out of operation for so many years that ——"

"Easy, now," said H.M. soothingly. "Besides, Golconda wasn't the mine; it was the place where the stones were cut and polished. Think again. What's the only independent native state in India, under British protection, where the ruler is known as the Nizam?"

"Hyderabad," said Evelyn, and made a triumphant face at me. "Golconda is a part of it. It's only seven miles away. Partial ——"

"I suppose, if you glanced at a newspaper, you saw an account of trouble in India?"

"It was the first thing I did notice in this confounded business," I said, "just before I read about Flamande and Gasquet. But I only looked at the headlines. What's it about?"

Ramsden hesitated. "No need to prattle about politics," he grunted. "Too

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much nonsense in 'em as it is. Briefly, there's a new diamond-field that's been turned up at Partial; the old Unicorn field, that was supposed to be played out. It's no secret to say it'll turn out to be rather richer than anything Rhodes found in South Africa. It's so big that . . . well, briefly, it could have caused a devil of a lot of trouble. Hyderabad is Hindu, but its governing class is nearly all Mohammedan. There was a local governor of the city — we'll omit names — who was out for trouble. With the possibilities unfolded by that discovery, it might have been touch-and-go with the people at large, if it didn't happen that the Nizam is the strongest and best man in the country; and his government advisers back him up. His answer to the trouble was a little present for the King of England. Inside this particular gift there was a small inscription to the effect that the new wealth of India would not be used to fight the friends of India. On the contrary, as a small token His Highness would like His Majesty to accept this small gift: the flat figure of a unicorn some ten inches long, and made entirely from the finest diamonds taken from the new field. And it went to London yesterday, to be presented at the Silver Jubilee. I had to sneak in and out to Hyderabad to make sure all went well; I even had to go to Athens to lay a false trail. . . ."

He chuckled again, shrugged his shoulders, and got up.

"The plane, I hear, is ready to take us to Paris," he said. "Shall we go on? I think a place could be found for you, Merrivale, if you'd like to send the taxi back?" He looked at D'Andrieu, who beamingly nodded. "What about you two?"

I looked at Evelyn, and we grinned at each other.

"Not this trip," I said firmly. "We've decided to see a little of southern France. . . ."

"Naturally!" roared H.M., and over his face stole an expression of profound glee.

THE END

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